

Oklahoma Pledge

Office of Disability Concerns

Fall 2015



September, 2015

Spinal Cord Injury Awareness



Spinal Cord Injury

A spinal cord injury (SCI) is an injury to the spinal cord resulting in a change, either temporary or permanent, in the cord's normal motor, sensory, or autonomic function. Common causes of damage are trauma (car accident, gunshot, falls, sports injuries, etc.) or disease (transverse myelitis, polio, spina bifida, Friedreich's ataxia, etc.). The spinal cord does not have to be severed in order for a loss of function to occur. Depending on where the spinal cord and nerve roots are damaged, the symptoms can vary widely, from pain to paralysis to incontinence. Spinal cord injuries are described at various levels of "incomplete", which can vary from having no effect on the patient to a "complete" injury which means a total loss of function.

Treatment of spinal cord injuries starts with restraining the spine and controlling inflammation to prevent further damage. The actual treatment can vary widely depending on the location and extent of the injury. In many cases, spinal cord injuries require substantial physical therapy and rehabilitation, especially if the patient's injury interferes with activities of daily life.

The American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA) first published an international classification of spinal cord injury in 1982, called the International Standards for Neurological and Functional Classification of Spinal Cord Injury.

A - indicates a "complete" spinal cord injury where no motor or sensory.

B - indicates an "incomplete" spinal cord injury where sensory but not motor function is preserved below the neurological level and includes the sacral segments S4-S5.

C - indicates an "incomplete" spinal cord injury where motor function is preserved below the neurological level, and MORE than half of key muscles below the

single neurological level of injury have a muscle grade less than 3.

D - indicates an "incomplete" spinal cord injury where motor function is preserved below the neurological level and at least half of the key muscles below the neurological level have a muscle grade of 3 or more.

E - indicates motor and sensation function are all graded normal (in all segments).

A severe injury may also cause problems in parts of the spine below the injured area. In a "complete" spinal injury, all functions below the injured area are lost. An "incomplete" spinal cord injury involves preservation of motor or sensory function below the level of injury in the spinal cord.

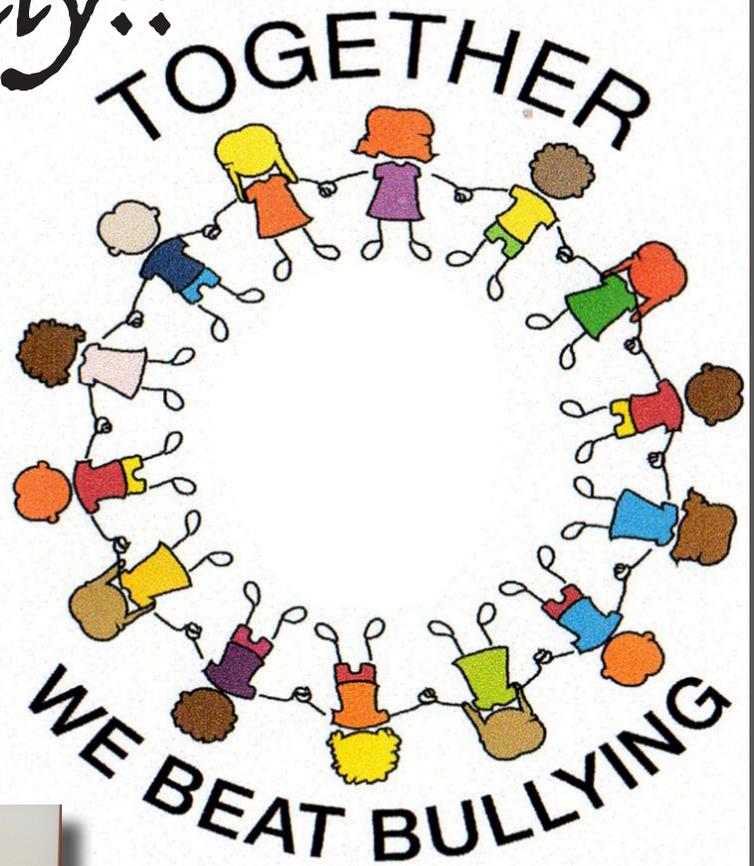
A complete injury frequently means that the patient has little hope of functional recovery. The relative incidence of incomplete injuries compared to complete spinal cord injury has improved over the past half century, due mainly to the emphasis on faster and better initial care and stabilization of spinal cord injury patients. Most patients with incomplete injuries recover at least some function.

Scientists are investigating various avenues for treatment of spinal cord injury. Numerous articles in the medical literature describe research, mostly in animal models, aimed at reducing the paralyzing effects of injury and promoting regrowth of functional nerve fibers. Despite the devastating effects of the condition, commercial funding for research investigating a cure after spinal cord injury is limited, partially due to the small size of the population of potential beneficiaries. Some experimental treatments, such as systemic hypothermia, have been performed in isolated cases in order to draw attention to the need for further preclinical and clinical studies to help clarify the role of hypothermia in acute spinal cord injury. Despite the limitation on funding, a number of experimental treatments such as local spine cooling and oscillating field stimulation have reached controlled human trials.



Coupon and Nutrition University Anti Bully Rally!!

Office of Disability Concerns, Guthrie Jobs Corps, OK Department of Human Services, Cobble Stone Counseling Services, Sisters in Motion, Civic Services Community Advocacy and John Vance Motors sponsored a anti Bully Rally "Together we beat bully!ing". The young people in attendance heard from speakers (Special thanks to State Senator Anastasia Pittman(D) District 48), activities and snow cones! (Healthy of course).



Financial CAPabilities!

In the past, you may have planned to save money at the end of the month. But, the reality is that you probably didn't have much left over.

You probably spent it—on all of your need expenses—and on want expenses.

You can change that. Rather than saving money only if you have any left over, you set some aside—no matter how small the amount—into savings right at the beginning of the month. This is called paying yourself first.

Save \$5, \$10, or \$20 a month, whatever amount you decide. Ideally, aim to save 10% of your income. For example, if your income every month is \$800, 10% would be \$80. The most important thing is to start saving now and make it a lifetime habit.

Tips for Successful Saving

- If you think that paying yourself first is easier said than done, here are some ideas to get started:
- Begin by looking at your want expenses. Are there some wants you could do without?
- Include “savings” as part of your spending plan. Make “saving” an expense in your budget. Make it come before spending for things you want but may not need.
- Try putting a \$1 a day, plus your pocket change, into a large envelope or jar. Keep it in a safe place. At the end of the month, deposit that money into your savings account. This can REALLY add up! (One dollar each day, just seven dollars each week, and you can save \$365 in a year!)
- When you shop for items like food and clothes, look for things that are on sale.
- Try shopping at thrift stores or garage sales. You can pick up some great bargains this way.
- Shop at dollar stores to get a lower price.
- Break expensive habits, such as excessive clothes-buying, drinking, or smoking, and save the difference.
- When you purchase a product, send in any rebate forms. Most people forget to take advantage of this savings tool.
- If possible, have your employer automatically deduct money from your paycheck and deposit it into your savings account. What you don't see, you won't miss. Even if the amount is small, you'll



be amazed how fast your savings grow.

- Another option is to have your bank or credit union automatically deduct a set amount from your checking account each month and deposit it in your savings account.
- Put any tax refund, raise or bonus you receive into savings rather than spending it.

Save that change!

Drop your spare change into the Coinstar Center machine at your local grocery store in exchange for a gift card. You may be charged a small fee if you decide you want a cash voucher instead of a gift card.

Buy yourself a digital coin bank so you can track how much you're saving when you drop in your spare change!

Saving Limits for People receiving Government Benefits

If you receive financial assistance from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or services from one of Oklahoma's Waiver Programs, make sure that your total resources (that includes the total of your checking and savings accounts) are within the program guidelines. For example, if you receive SSI, the total for your countable resources cannot be more than \$2,000. You can own a home and one car for essential transportation, and the value of these items is not counted against the \$2,000 resource limit.

The waiver guidelines are a little more flexible, but there are still strict limits on how much you can earn each month as well as the total amount of countable resources you may have and still maintain your services.

For more information about SSI, go to the Social Security Administration website, www.ssa.gov. For information about Oklahoma's waiver programs, visit the Oklahoma Department of Human Services website.

There are Ways to Save Money and Not Lose Benefits

There is good news. It may be possible for you to save money and be able to keep your SSI payments and waiver services. The three most common ways to save money are with a PASS account, a Special Needs Trust, or with an individual Development Account (IDA).

Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

For people with disabilities who plan to work, or are working, it's possible to set up a savings account, called a Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), through the Social Security Administration, which will allow you to set aside monies for a specific item or service that is needed for a work goal. These monies will not be counted against your resource limit for SSI. A PASS can make it possible for you to save the money you need for a down payment for a vehicle that will help you get to a job, or for a computer that will allow you to start your own business.

Special Needs Trusts

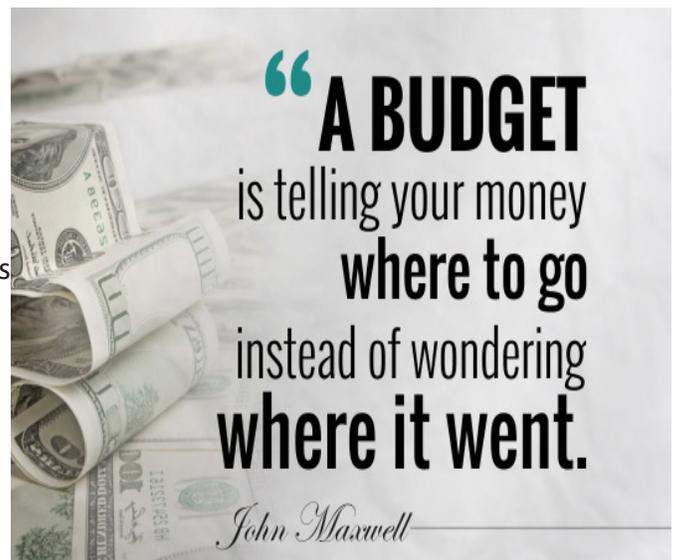
A Special Needs Trust is a specially designed account that can be very helpful if you receive government benefits (like SSI, Medical Assistance or food stamps) which limit how much you are allowed to save in your bank or credit union accounts. If the Trust is created in the right way, the money in the Trust won't be counted against the limits the government has set up for how much money you can save. Trusts can be complicated, and there are important things to know:

- A family member or friend may establish a Trust on your behalf.
- Family members or friends can deposit money into the Trust.
- A Trust can be used to pay for big expenses, like a trip to visit family, a new computer or a TV.
- A Trust cannot be used to pay for regular, reoccurring expenses, like food, rent or utility bills.
- A Trust can be a good way to plan for your future.

To find out more about Trusts, speak with a lawyer who has experience with Trusts.

Individual Development Accounts (IDAs)

Individual Development Account (IDA) programs help people with a low-income save money for things like education, starting a business, or buying assistive technology. For every dollar a person puts into an IDA, the program will add a dollar (often more). Before you can receive this matching amount, you have to agree to the rules of the program, such as making regular contributions to the account or taking free classes on how to manage money. For more information about IDAs, or to find a program near you, you can contact the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) at www.cfed.org, or you can contact your local United Way.



Tip of the Hat from CAP School Days

We are into the fall semester of colleges and universities across Oklahoma, and many Department of Rehabilitation job seekers have concerns about their tuition, books and fees. DRS can pay for higher education if that education is necessary to achieve an Employment Outcome which you have chosen.

If you have not received a check for tuition, books and fees by now there may be a reason for this. Your counselor needs written information from you before they do an authorization which will generate your check.

Your counselor needs information about your enrollment in writing as well as the cost of your classes. They will also need documentation of the cost of your books. Take your books to the cashier and ask the cashier to ring up the book costs on a statement which you can provide to your counselor.

These things then provide written justification for the money which will be spent on your case. This documentation covers the expenditure of funds when the agency is audited. The agency must answer to its federal overseers that it is spending money wisely and specifically to prepare a client for employment.

When your DRS counselor has done a written authorization, this will tell State Office that it is time to send a check to you to cover specific expenses. Sometimes your counselor will not complete an authorization immediately after getting information about your enrollment, tuition, books and fees. Sometimes the counselor will ask the tech who works for them to do the authorization, and that can add some time to the process.

After the authorization for your tuition, books and fees has been done it typically takes 7-10 working days for you to get a check. If it has been much longer than this, you may contact your counselor and/or that counselor's tech to find out if and when the authorization was done.

You should receive a check in a timely manner. It is then your responsibility to pay the costs of your education. If DRS is listed as a responsible party for your education on your Individual Plan for Employment, they will generally ask that you apply for a Pell Grant before they pay.

If you are not eligible for a Pell Grant, you should still apply and receive a denial in writing which then alerts DRS that they need to pick up the bill. If Pell covers all your expenses, DRS will not pay anything that semester. DRS will begin paying the cost of your education after your Pell Grant has been exhausted.

If someone is trying to get you to take out a student loan to pay for education which DRS has agreed to do on your Individual Plan for Employment, talk to your counselor before you do anything. The agency may ask you to apply for a grant to pay for your education, but they may not ask you to take out a loan to pay for something they have agreed to do in writing.

Let's talk about grades. Grades are important because they measure your success in the education process. Agency policy indicates that you must maintain a 2.0 grade point average in a 4.0 scale for them to finance education.

If you fall below 2.0 in any given semester, DRS will not pay for your education the following semester. They will resume payment when you bring your grade point average up to 2.0. Lower grades will cost you money. Remember to provide your grades to your counselor as soon as you receive them. Your counselor must have your previous semester's grades before they authorize the next semester.

Payment for tuition, books and fees for education is a process. A lot of things have to happen correctly for this process to go smoothly. Yes, there are many things you must do, but sometimes the counselor may not have done something in a reasonable time. CAP is an advocacy program which serves job seekers from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation.

If you have questions or concerns, call 405-521-3756 #7. I'll be happy to talk with you about your concerns. With a release of information from you, I may contact your DRS counselor to make further inquiries. It is important that you receive the supports you need in order to get the employment you want.



"Your counselor needs written information from you before they do an authorization which will generate your check."

"Lower grades will cost you money."

Coping with Vision Loss

ONE-DAY SEMINAR



Sat., Sept. 19, 2015, 9-4pm

To reserve your place or to donate, call:

(405) 642-1068 or (405) 401-7770

Sponsored by **Heartland Council of the Blind**

Oklahoma Council of the Blind & New Hope United Methodist Church

The Oklahoma Council of the Blind & New Hope United Methodist Church will be hosting a one-day seminar. "Coping with Vision Loss", September 19, 2015, 9 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., located at New Hope United Methodist Church Gym, 11600N.Council Rd., Oklahoma City, OK 73162.

The Seminar will provide informative break-out sessions concentrating on specific topics to help you. Registration forms must be received by Wednesday, September 16, 2015 with a Registration fee of \$20.00. Please mail to The Heartland Council of the Blind, PO BOX 30335, Midwest City, OK 73130

“We are here to help”

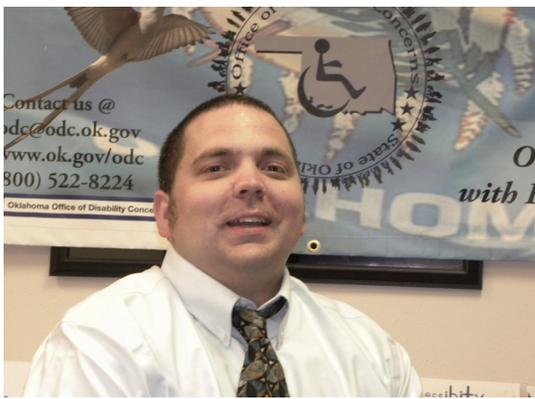
Our disability specialist are available to help you with your questions, concerns and issues to enable you to effect change through self advocacy.

Self-advocacy refers to the civil rights movement people with disabilities. It is also an important term in the disability rights movement, referring to people with disabilities taking control of their own lives, including being in charge of their own care in the medical system. The self-advocacy movement is about people with disabilities speaking up for themselves. It means that although a person with a disability may call upon the support of others, the individual is entitled to be in control of their own resources and how they are directed. It is about having the right to make life decisions without undue influence or control by others.

The self-advocacy seeks to reduce the isolation of people with disabilities and give them the tools and experience to take greater control over their own lives. The self-advocacy movement for people with disabilities lags far behind many other civil rights efforts. This is due to many factors that can include barriers such as low literacy, communications, forced isolation, and failure to be included in many sociality interactions and events.

The self-advocacy movement for people with disabilities has its roots in the broader civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s but is in many respects still in its infancy. Though the major milestone was the American with Disabilities Act and the guidelines built on this civil rights law.

Our office works with you to identify opportunities



Jacob
Disability Specialist
“Stay Positive!”



Kyle
Disability Specialist
“Accountability!”



Valencia
Disability Specialist
“Always available to help.”

for you to take action. Action may include contact with resources, education and even one on one counseling. The resources are typically local based on where you may live.

Inclusion advocates for the idea that all people should freely, openly and without pity accommodate any person with a disability without restrictions or limitations of any kind

“We are here to help!”

Outreach to community is important. Our community is not just people with a disability, but also community resources, groups, agencies and employers. Also act as the resource for legislators to help them with their constituents on issues and requests for assistance. ODC maintains an information website that contains a wide variety of information for both people with a disability and the community as a whole. We are expanding our social media presence to expand our message.

What is our message? It is very simple, it's about creating an environment in which people with disabilities feel valued and respected. To bridge the gap that exists between people with disabilities and our world. We partner to create awareness about the great things that inclusion can bring.

Follow US on Twitter!



Find US and Friend us on Facebook!



William
Client Assistance Program
"People with disabilities can achieve their dreams."



Jude
Administration



Shaun
Intern

Frank's Journey

A Podcast

Tune into Frank's podcast at
<http://ok.gov/odc/Employment/FranksPodcasts/index.html>

Returning to work after having a Disability is hard decision to make. There are many questions you need to ask yourself. Am I ready to go back to work physically, mentally, and emotionally? What would I want to do for a job? What are my skills, my education, my experience, and what my Abilities? Am I ready to leave my comfort zone?

Losing your SSDI benefits and Medicare also needs to be considered. There are many questions you will need to carefully consider before returning to work.

There are lots of programs on the federal and state level that make returning to work easier on the person with a disability. The Ticket to Work Program through Social Security allows a person with a disability on SSDI a nine month trial work period to see if you could handle returning to work. The trial work period is time to see if you can transition into the workforce while continuing to receive your disability Benefits. The trial work period takes some of the stress away while making the transition back to work.

Vocational Rehab through the State is a program that will help you return to work with the right accommodations. You will be set up with a vocational counselor who will go over an employment plan. You may need job training, school, help with resume, or just help finding a job it would be set out in your job plan. The Vocational Rehab program assists you with your job planning and placement.

The job climate for people with disability is very strong. People with disabilities have a unique skill set that sets them apart from other workers. The different experiences on a daily basis give workers with disabilities a competitive advantage over other workers. Businesses and organizations are looking for a diverse workforce with a variety of skills, and experiences. People have a more positive view of companies and organizations that hire people with disabilities.

Today's workforce requires a diverse worker with unique skills. Organizations are hiring people with disabilities at a larger rate now because of what a great stable and qualified worker we are. Maybe it is time for you to start the process and go back to work.

Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act

ABLE Act Overview

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2013 (S. 313/H.R.647) was introduced in the 113th Congress by a bipartisan, bicameral set of Congressional Champions including Sens. Robert Casey, Jr., (D-PA) and Richard Burr (R-NC), and Reps. Ander Crenshaw (R-FL), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA), and Pete Sessions (R-TX).

The ABLE Act would amend Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Service Code of 1986 to create tax-free savings accounts for individuals with disabilities. The bill aims to ease financial strains faced by individuals with disabilities by making tax-free savings accounts available to cover qualified expenses such as education, housing, and transportation. The bill would supplement, but not supplant, benefits provided through private insurances, the Medicaid program, the supplemental security income program, the beneficiary's employment, and other sources.

An ABLE account could fund a variety of essential expenses for individuals, including medical and dental care, education, community based supports, employment training, assistive technology, housing, and transportation. The ABLE Act provides individuals with disabilities the same types of flexible savings tools that all other Americans have through college savings accounts, health savings accounts, and individual retirement accounts. The legislation also contains Medicaid fraud protection against abuse and a Medicaid pay-back provision when the beneficiary passes away. It will eliminate barriers to work and saving by preventing dollars saved through ABLE accounts from counting against an individual's eligibility for any federal benefits program.



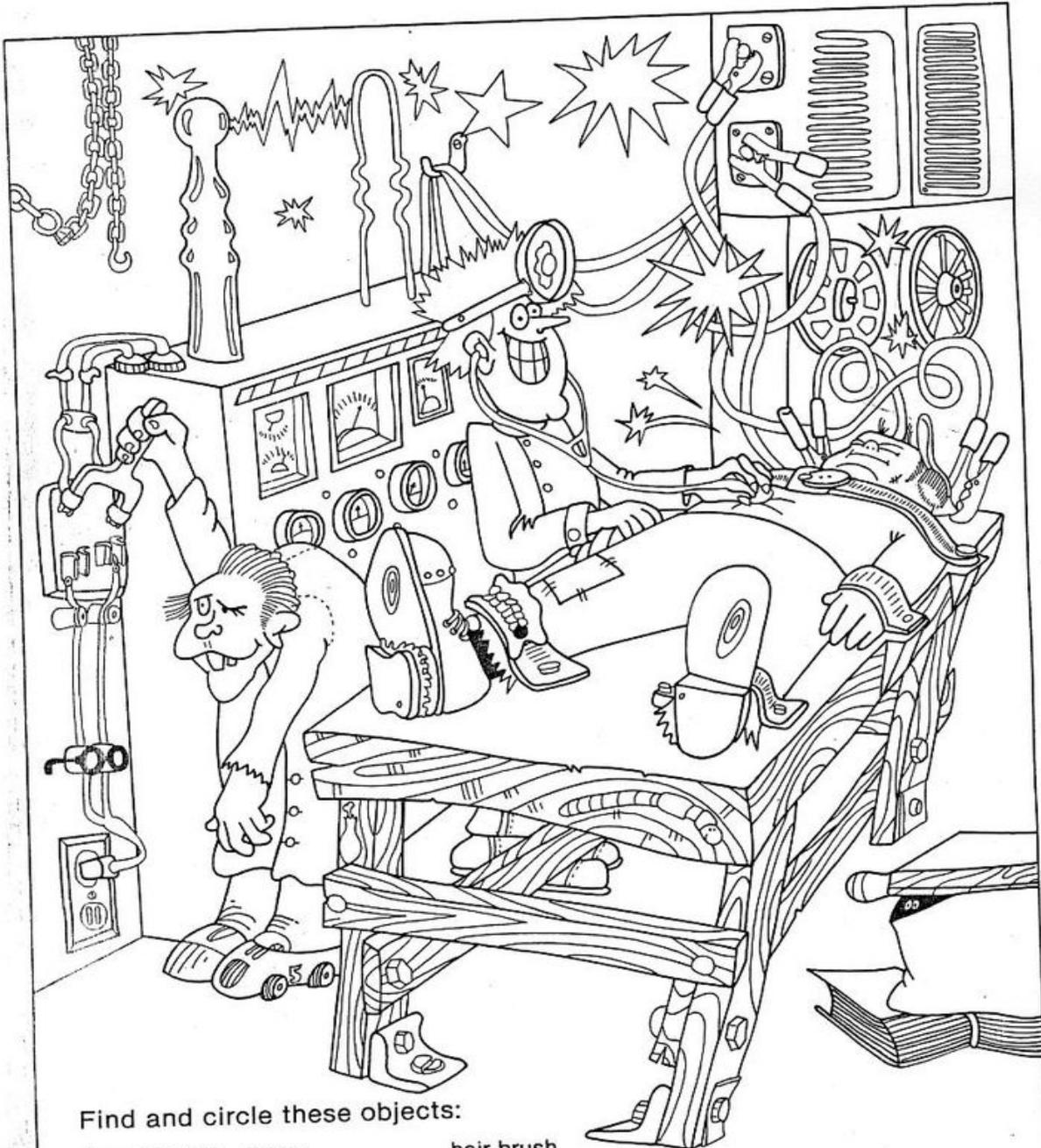
Facts about Corn....

- A bushel is a unit of measure for volumes of dry commodities such as shelled corn kernels. 1 Bushel of corn is equal to 8 gallons.
- With the exception of Antarctica, corn is produced on every continent in the world.
- There are over 3,500 different uses for corn products.
- Corn and its by products are also found in many non-food items such as fireworks, rust preventatives, glue, paint, dyes, laundry detergent, soap, aspirin, antibiotics, paint,

shoe polish, ink, cosmetics, the manufacturing of photographic film, and in the production of plastics.

- Corn is also used as feeding fodder for livestock and poultry and found in domestic pet food.
- As of 2012, the United States produces 40% of the world's total harvest making it the biggest maize producer in the world (273,832,130 tons produced in 2012).
- In the days of the early settlers to North America corn was so valuable that it was used as money and traded for other products such as meat and furs.
- Corn is now a completely domesticated plant so you're unlikely to find it growing in the wild.

Help the Mad Scientist find his missing stuff!



Find and circle these objects:

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| diamond ring | worm | hair brush |
| hair pin | wagon wheel | comb |
| sling shot | egg in frying pan | star |
| sandwich | match stick | toy car |
| drumstick | false teeth | eye glasses |

Name _____ 81

Autumn Words

M	A	P	L	E	T	R	E	E	Z	B	J
L	W	G	P	A	V	Y	E	L	L	O	W
O	B	J	U	P	E	Y	F	H	G	S	Z
R	X	K	M	P	G	O	D	A	E	J	P
A	E	C	P	L	E	C	L	R	E	B	E
N	C	H	K	E	T	T	E	V	S	R	A
G	O	I	I	S	A	O	A	E	E	O	R
E	L	L	N	E	B	B	V	S	X	W	X
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V	R	Y	A	E	E	R	S	R	I	C	E
X	S	X	Y	D	S	S	C	H	O	O	L
C	S	W	E	A	T	E	R	F	A	L	L



apple
brown
chilly
colors
fall

geese
harvest
hay
leaves
maple tree

October
orange
pear
pumpkin
red

rice
school
sweater
vegetables
yellow

What animal migrates in fall?

How is the weather in fall?



Getting to Work

The key finding of the 2015 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey is that Americans with disabilities are striving to work. They are working, actively preparing for employment, searching for jobs, seeking more hours, and successfully overcoming barriers in the workplace.

Striving to work. As part of the survey the foundation found that within the sample of the disabled community:

- 43.6% - previously worked and are not looking for work.
- 29.9% - are working and not looking for new work
- 12.7% - are working and are looking for new work
- 7.9% - previously worked and are looking for new work
- 0.8% - never worked and are looking for work
- 5.1% - never worked and are not looking for work

Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a teamwork, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

Vince Lombardi

Of these groups a common number of 68.4% were striving to work!

As part of the effort to work we can break it down into two major areas; Preparing and Searching.

Preparing for Work. People with disabilities are actively preparing for employment—another indicator that they are striving for work. Among non-working job seekers, the top three activities used to prepare for work are:

- 72.7% - obtaining medical / treatment rehabilitation
- 62.4% - getting other help from friends
- 47.1% - ongoing to school or college

Searching for Jobs. People with disabilities are actively searching for jobs, yet another way they are striving for work. Among non-working job seekers, the top three approaches used to search for work are:

- 76.7% - looking for and applying for jobs on line
- 68.1% - through friends or relatives
- 61.2% - contacting employers directly

In the community barriers are a major concerns and a constant issue. The major barriers are Over Coming Barriers during Job Search, Overcoming Barriers at the Workplace and the biggest Over Coming Barriers from Family and Friends.



ARE YOU READY?

Overcoming Barriers–Job Search. People with disabilities are overcoming barriers when looking for jobs. Non-working job seekers were asked about their experience with barriers in the job search process. The top three barriers they faced are:

- 41.1% - report not enough education or training, with 38.5% of these individuals overcoming this barrier,
- 36.0% - report employers assuming they can't do the job, with 32.8% of these individuals overcoming this barrier,
- 25.6% report a lack of transportation, with 41.9% of these individuals overcoming this barrier.

Overcoming Barriers–In the Workplace. Current workers were asked about their experience with barriers in the workplace. The top three barriers they are faced are:

- 16.5% - getting less pay than others in a similar job, with 38.6% of these individuals overcoming this barrier
- 15.7% - attitudes on the part of their supervisor with 41.3% of these individuals overcoming this barrier
- 15.5% - attitudes on the part of their coworkers with 54.5% of these individuals overcoming this barrier

Over coming barriers-with the family. The workplace barrier most likely to be overcome is a family member discouraging them from working, with 6.5% reporting this barrier, and 64.3% of these individuals overcoming it. The barrier least likely to be overcome is lack of job counseling, with 5.5% reporting this barrier, and 33.3% of these individuals reporting that they overcame it.

A good job is more than just a paycheck. A good job fosters independence and discipline, and contributes to the health of the community. A good job is a means to provide for the health and welfare of your family, to own a home, and save for retirement.
James H. Douglas, Jr.

Workplace accommodations. The provision of workplace accommodations is not just a central tenet of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is an important facet of corporate America's efforts to attract and keep exceptional and talented employees. Among current workers, the top three accommodations are:

- 28.4% - flexible schedules (flexible start and end times, work at home, taking more breaks),
- 14.0% - modified job duties (reduced hours, light duty, less demanding job tasks), and
- 13.6% - building accessibility being addressed.

These are lots of numbers, but what does it all mean? If you are looking for work, it identifies the methods that you can take on each barrier to reach your employment goal. The knowledge of the barrier and the best method to overcome it enables you to look for and achieve your employment.

YOUR Road to Employment

Ability Job Fair 2015

October 22, 2015

Shepherd Mall - 2401 NW 23rd St

Oklahoma City, OK 73107

10 am to 3 pm



The Oklahoma Works partners and the Office of Disability Concerns welcomes you to our first Fall Ability Job Fair. On Thursday, October 22nd, 2015, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Whether you're seeking ways to advance your career, or changing careers.

We're excited to share this exclusive opportunity and offer ways to empower your networking skills, learn effective interpersonal principles, and achieve your new job destination.

All roads lead to many potential employers offering quality jobs in the areas of Federal, State of Oklahoma, Retail, Banking, Manufacturing, and many more.

As an added attraction several metro colleges will be on hand if interested in returning or completing your educational goals.

Need a rest stop on the road? Why not visit our informative Round Table discussions! We will be offering several Round Tables to allow you to ask questions about important employment topics and get the answers you need!

We have employers, we have great information, all we need is you to travel the Road to Employment!

Are you ready for the big trip?
Why not visit you local OK Works center and prepare for your road trip to a great job!

- Resume reviewed by professional job coaches
- Take a class on job readiness
- Practice your interview skills!
- Learn your job preferences
- Improve your marketable skills
- and much much more.....

Things you need to pack for your big trip!

Resume - a good current resume is the best way to let your future employer know your skills and talents. You may need multiple resumes for different jobs.

Personal Commercial - have you practiced your **30 second speech** about yourself? When you visit an employer you can lead off with your commercial

Dress for Success - do you have clothing that will best represent you? Is it clean and pressed?

Research -Get ahead of the crowd – know your potential employer's mission, vision, and information prior to interview.

Transportation - do you have a plan to get to the Ability Job fair? And then back home?

Questions - do you have a list of questions to ask?

Interview Skills - Have you practiced an interview? Research what kind of questions they may ask?



OKLAHOMA
WORKS

Service Dogs and our returning veterans

a story from a Mom....

Upon returning from Iraq in 2010, my son Reuben had the same difficulty that many soldiers face returning to the civilian world; he had a hard time keeping a job because his superiors were in his words, not leading. He found it hard to stand in line at the grocery store simply because he felt that he was needed somewhere else, standing in line seemed useless and in some cases he felt like he had walked into a trap. The sound of a car backfiring would send my son to another place, in another time. I remember walking beside him at a restaurant and just before we went inside a child screamed in joy over some small matter, but my son was on the ground positioned in a "ready" stance. That's when he knew he needed help.

The first counselor he visited was former military. She knew the symptoms and made a relatively easy diagnosis for Reuben. Alerting him to the fact that he was suffering from PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, was the first step. Convincing him that he was going to be alright with time and a conscious effort on his part to change the way he processes information, that was another story. One of her suggestions to Reuben seemed odd at first, but when we thought about it, it made all the sense in the world. "Get a dog", she said. A dog will be able to help you with the understanding of whether or not something bad is about to happen. The counselor stated that noises affect dogs differently than they affect people with PTSD. Sufferers of PTSD, she said, didn't always know when something bad was happening so they assumed everything that happens is bad. A dog can detect whether or not there really is a threat. Keeping the dog with him as much as possible would be the best solution. This meant that Reuben's dog would need to be a service dog, or at least be able to be trained as one.

As we entered the Ardmore Animal Shelter I felt a relief in my spirit almost immediately. I have volunteered at shelters for years, but this was the first time I had ventured into the Ardmore shelter. It was big, it was clean, it was organized, and it was beautiful. We were greeted by the office animals, two cats and a little red mutt, probably part Dachshund, but something told me that these were not on the list for my soldier boy. He would no doubt be looking for a larger dog, perhaps a German Shepherd, a Labrador, or something with the keen senses you read about, those needed to protect a person with this form of disability. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a disability. The disorder can destabilize a person to the point of possibly being a danger to himself or others. Finding this dog may have been the turning point that my son needed. I was very happy to be a part of the journey, the mission, as he called it.

We walked into the vast open almost warehouse looking room that held cage after metal cage of dogs. Big dogs, little dogs, fat dogs and thin. Barking dogs, sleeping dogs, dogs that looked as if they had never seen the light of day. Depressed dogs, angry dogs, dogs who if they were human could easily have looked like my son Reuben; I remember saying to myself this is the day that two souls are changed forever. I was right. We found her. She was sitting alone in a cage off to the left of where I was standing. Reuben was looking at a German Shepherd mix wondering if he would want a puppy or an adult dog. I was staring at a Basset Hound whose eyes were not only speaking to me, but they were begging me to help her. She seemed to be reaching through the wire of the cage saying "If you take me, I promise I will never let him out of my sight. I will follow him wherever he goes, I will..." She seemed to be making a plea for her life. I called Reuben over to the cage where she stood shivering with fear.

"That's a Basset Hound Mom." My son wasn't sure why I was looking at a hound, when a working dog was more of an obvious choice. "She's a soldier, Reuben" was my answer, "and you can't leave one behind." I have NO idea why I said that, it just came out. As it turns out, when we opened the cage and brought the dog to the play area, she didn't squirm, wiggle, or dance for us, she literally lay in my son's lap and cried. Tears came out of the dog's eyes. There was no explanation for it. She was not going to be put back in that cage, not ever. This was the beginning of a real friendship.

Today, more than 5 years later, Molly and Reuben work every day together. He takes her to class with him sometimes. He has broken the chains of PTSD to a great degree. He knows how to discern real danger from false flags; and he'll tell you that having Molly by his side did help him with simple decisions of whether or not to be on guard. If the dog was on guard, he would go on guard. If the dog was relaxed, he could relax. This sounds so simple, but it was anything but simple. It took weeks, months, and possibly years for this type of stress-free behavior to come to my son, but he could not have done it alone.



Kyle's Korner - Personal Responsibility

Happiness

When you hear the word "responsibility," what do you think of first? Many people think of the word BLAME, as in, "Whose responsibility is this?" I'd like to instead suggest that you think of responsibility as seizing what's in front of you, exerting choice, and taking control. The real meaning of responsibility is the ability to respond. It's going out and creating what you want through personal choices.

The fundamental responsibility that each of us has is that we are completely, 100% responsible for how our lives turn out. This is tough! When we like how things are turning out, it's quite easy to say that we are responsible for our success. But when things aren't so good, we're so quick to point fingers at other people and place the blame on them. Have you ever known someone who will accept no responsibility? Some people are perpetual victims of what other people do!

It's really easy to do. But remember this—when you point your finger outside, you have just now accepted the victim status. You have ultimate control over your life. You have control over your friends, your love relationships, and your career. You decide for yourself what's right and what's wrong, whether you should stay in this weekend or go out, whether to vote Democrat or Republican. You decide whom to see, what to wear, and what to eat.

However, you have very little control over the government, international affairs, economic policy, the rise and fall of the stock market, Mother Nature, and your company direction. But changes like these can often disrupt your life and force you to change your plans. Often there is very little you can do about it, and yet you are overwhelmingly affected by it. Taking personal responsibility means realizing you can't control certain things and to stop trying.

These things will happen. They just will. You will get no warning and nobody will prepare you. And that's frustrating. Because people will tell you to "reach for the stars—you can achieve whatever you want!" But they don't mention that in the process, a comet might smack you upside the head. And few people talk about the possibility of outside circumstances adversely affecting your ambitions. And yet, how many of you can say that your ambitions and dreams have been left intact despite the events of the last couple years?

So don't try to change the uncontrollable, attempt to figure out what's going to happen, or try to control circumstances. Remember that you must have the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

It is never circumstances that make you happy. If it were, then people with great circumstances would never be unhappy, and that's hardly the situation. Individuals with disabilities—some compete in Special Olympics and are happy. Some gain and secure great employment and are happy. While others with the same disabilities sit around and are miserable for their entire lives. Two people with the same circumstances are in two totally different states of mind. We have the ability to choose our attitudes given a certain set of circumstances, but we don't always practice or acknowledge this. Why? It's scary.

Serious change takes serious courage. It's so scary that most of us don't even know how to approach it realistically. The good news is that you don't have to head off to the islands with a paintbrush in hand in order to have a better life. You only have to accept what is and take personal responsibility for what you can change.

Ever think that you'd be happy if you had more money? Ever think that if you'd only find the perfect mate, you would be happy? Ever think that if your significant other or a family member would change somehow, then you'd be happy? Ever think that if you'd lose some weight, you'd be happy? Well, here's some big news for you. If you're not happy without a relationship, you're not going to be happy with one. If you're not happy without the money, you're not going to be happy with it. If you're not happy with the weight, you're not going to be happy without it. And that's good news—it means you can stop waiting for your circumstances to change to make you happy. Accept what you cannot change, change the things you can, and take personal responsibility for making yourself happy.



Happiness is an attitude, not an occasion.



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