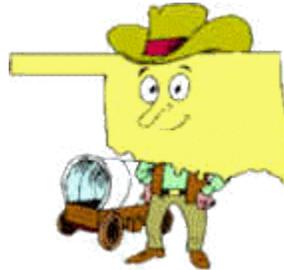


Office of Disability Concerns

Will's Corner, Oklahoma



(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

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Jeri Cooper

Jeri Cooper comes into the Office of Disability Concerns with her driver. She has an appointment for this interview, and she is on time. Why does she have a driver? Jeri has been deaf and blind all her life.

Let's qualify what we mean by deaf and blind. She was born with some sight, but now she functions with artificial eyes which look quite natural. She has no vision whatsoever. She has a 95% hearing loss in both ears with the strongest hearing aids. She shouldn't be able to understand any speech, but here we are doing this interview.

Jeri finds a seat in the conference room and mentally makes a note that the upholstery has a slight nap. Without my noticing she runs her hand around the edge of the conference table to note that at least part of that table is rounded.

The door is behind her and to the left—something I never notice. But I am not deaf or blind. I have vision and hearing which I take quite for granted. How would you get around if you didn't have these senses to orient you to your environment?

Jeri has found a way. She says you have to learn to do things differently when you have a disability. I am amazed. How are we even having this conversation?

Jeri says she heard me say the word "twenty" which with her limited hearing, she heard as if it were "wenty". Her mind tells her instantly what I actually said by looking at the context of the words. Twenty fits.

What I can't understand is how you could make these multiple mental calculations instantly and understand what is spoken to you. She says it helps because I am sitting directly across from her, and I have a voice range that she can understand more easily.

But I know it can't be that simple. If I get the T sound and the P sound confused, that's going to have a major impact on what I understand of someone else's speech. If the S and F sound are also confused—forget it. I'm not even going to try to understand what you're saying.

Doctors told her mother to put her into the Hissom State School which was an institution for people with a cognitive disorder. Jeri was never mentally retarded. Her mother said no to any attempt to take her daughter out of the home.

She worked with Jeri intensively encouraging her to use the sight and hearing she had at the time to the maximum. Mom did not do it for Jeri. She let Jeri learn to do it for herself although she was there to intervene if it became more than Jeri could handle. Her mother never gave up, and Jeri was a determined little girl to boot.

Jeri shops for herself, but she does not hesitate to ask for help. She calls a store manager before she comes down asking for a convenient time for the manager to help her pick out brands. She knows what she wants.

She buys clothing which has different textures. She knows the silky feel is the red blouse, and the heavy socks are the black ones. She tells me the colors of all the clothing she is wearing today. Those colors are coordinated I might add.

Doesn't being both deaf and blind get on Jeri's nerves a little? Yea, sometimes she gets upset waiting for her husband to read her mail to her. But don't we all get upset with spouses for one thing or another.

Jeri Cooper has spent years learning how to adjust to being both deaf and blind. She talks about it like she was just taking a walk on the beach on a warm, sunny afternoon. I am amazed.



She tells me about her new job. She is a Deaf/Blind Specialist for the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services in Tulsa. She teaches people what they want to know if they have this dual-sensory disability. She spreads to others what her mother taught her. Life is full of possibilities.

The interview goes on and on, but I am still at the beginning. Yes, Jeri likes to bowl and scored a 158 recently. Yes, she watches baseball and hears about a particular play on her Walkman radio before sighted fans can see what's happening out on the field.

Yes, but I'm still back at the beginning when she first walked into the door. I never really got past how does she do it. Maybe there really are miracles. If there are, I think Jeri Cooper is one of them.

Quotable Quotes

Remember to always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.

With Their Eyes on the Poor

Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry (TMM) is a coalition of faith-based organizations in Tulsa. It includes representatives of many protestant, Catholic and Orthodox faith communities in the Tulsa area. In the early 1990's Muslim groups were included, and this expanded to Hindu and Buddhist groups after 2000.

TMM began way back in 1925 known as the Ministerial Alliance of Tulsa. In 1937 that ministerial alliance became the Tulsa Council of Churches. It became the Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry in 1971, but it traces its origin back 75 years.

TMM has found a common ground in that most world religions have an eye on the poor and disenfranchised members of their community. They don't talk theology. Their motto is "We need not believe alike to love alike."

How has TMM shown their love through the years? That is an amazing story. Get ready for this. TMM has been directly responsible for beginning some of the major social-service organizations in Tulsa.

Here is a partial listing. The Meals on Wheels program for citizens in need of a hot meal actually began as a program within Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry or one of its predecessors organizations.

Life Senior Services is a spinoff of TMM which works with senior citizens in a number of ways. Youth Services of Tulsa provides counseling to children and youth, and it began as a program within TMM.

Transportation for senior citizens primarily to doctor's appointments was addressed as a need within TMM. You may know that program today as the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, but the inspiration began in Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry.

In 2001 TMM inspired the Day Center for the Homeless in Tulsa. The day center meets a real need of homeless individuals who have no place to go during the day when the homeless shelters are closed.

Most recently TMM has identified a need for spouses involved in domestic violence. TMM has begun to fund a chaplain at the Family Safety Center to deal with spiritual concerns of battered spouses. In the future TMM may sponsor more chaplains at various locations in the Tulsa area.

Faith communities make a difference in the Tulsa metropolitan area. They have combined their efforts into a coalition to better serve people who are poor and meet the needs of their citizens.

If you would like to know more about Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry, you may contact their website at www.tumm.org. You can call them at 918-582-3147 or visit their offices at 221 S. Nogales.

Post Script:

This Disability Program Specialist shared with Mark Rickman (interim director TMM) some of the needs of the community of people with disabilities. I hear frequently from people who need a ramp

built to their home. I also hear from people with disabilities who are moving from one part of the city in which they live to another part. They need some group with a pickup truck to help them move.

*My niece told me she
wants to dress up as a
401-K for Halloween
so that she can
become invisible.*

The Oklahoma University Counseling Psychology Clinic

The University of Oklahoma in Norman has a counseling psychology clinic located off Highway 9 on Marshall Avenue. The clinic has offered counseling services on an ability-to-pay basis for many years. In May, 2010 they began offering counseling without charge to those people who need services and have no means to pay.

The program is available to anyone in Oklahoma, but since it is located in Norman, most clients come from nearby urban and rural areas. The free program is limited to eight 50-minute sessions although longer counseling services are available through the fee-for-service program or through referrals to other resources.

The eight sessions are based on a brief-therapy model in which counselors use information from a previous telephone screening to get right down to issues. The counselor establishes treatment goals with the client and helps the client to prioritize their goals and begin to resolve them. Where appropriate the client may be referred to other places to address issues on a long-term basis.

All counselors are graduate students working on either a master's program in Community Counseling or doctoral level program in Counseling Psychology. They serve under close supervision with a licensed psychologist.

Dr. Lisa Frey who is the Clinic Director of the O.U. Counseling Psychology Clinic got the idea for a free clinic after having to turn away an individual who was not able to pay even a minimal fee but needed counseling to start their lives in a positive direction. The free program began in May, 2010 although there is also an ability-to-pay program for clients who can afford to pay something.

The typical client calls for service, and their names and telephone numbers are passed on to someone who does a 20-30 minute telephone screening to get information about the applicant. If the clinic decides they can help someone, that person is assigned to a counselor who sets up convenient session times.

The clinic telephone number is only staffed during hours of operation. The clinic is open from 12:30 to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and on Saturday from 9 a.m. till noon. Anyone can call 405-325-2914 to initiate the process.

If you are a person who needs counseling but have limited means to pay for it, consider the O.U. Counseling Psychology Clinic in Norman. If traveling to Norman is not possible, check other colleges and universities with a graduate-level psychology program. In these days of tight budgets for social-service agencies, this may be one way to get your needs met.