MDOD Launches Employed Individuals with Disabilities Outreach Project

Fear of losing benefits – especially medical insurance – is perhaps the greatest disincentive to work for people with disabilities.

Working to address this issue, the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), in partnership with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), is launching an outreach project to expand enrollment in the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) Program, an action that will increase access to work and Medicaid coverage for Marylanders with disabilities.

“The Employed Individuals with Disabilities program is the most powerful work incentive for people with disabilities created in Maryland in decades,” said Cathy Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities. “Reaching out to Marylanders who are eligible for this program and giving them the resources that will allow them to be part of the Maryland workforce is an important objective for this Administration.”

The Employed Individuals with Disabilities program offers the security of continuing health insurance to working adults with disabilities whose income and resources would otherwise disqualify them for public medical insurance through other programs. EID provides Medicaid coverage to working Marylanders with disabilities for a nominal fee ($150 per year).

Over 800 people have requested applications since the program began in April 2006, but only approximately 200 of these applications have been returned. The first step of MDOD’s outreach program will be to contact these individuals, answer questions and offer assistance with the application process. The project will also target people who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), but whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid through other programs. If they are working, many of those individuals will be eligible for the EID program. People who are not employed, but would like to work so they can qualify for EID, will be referred to the appropriate services.

In addition to targeted outreach to individuals with disabilities, MDOD (cont. on page 4)

NEWS BRIEFS

DESTIN Enterprise, LLC will sponsor a career fair with an emphasis on people with disabilities on October 23, 2007 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at the Ten Oaks Ballroom, 5000 Signal Bell Lane, Clarksville, MD.

The event will feature local employers of all industries as well as not-for-profit organizations and federal agencies. The event is free to the public and all candidates are encouraged to attend. Interested employers and sponsors may contact Ed Crenshaw at 443-538-1351 for more information.
Governor proclaims October Disability Employment Awareness Month

Governor Martin O’Malley proclaimed October as Disability Employment Awareness Month in Maryland, recognizing the State’s commitment to the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), particularly as it relates to the rights and freedom for people with disabilities to work and advance in their chosen careers.

“Through the Maryland Department of Disabilities and other State agencies we are working to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities, both in the public and private sectors,” said Governor O’Malley. “People with disabilities have the potential to be outstanding workers, and we are dedicated to ensuring they are empowered to achieve their personal and career goals in order to lead independent, productive and full lives within their communities.”

In Maryland approximately 850,000 individuals or 18 percent of the total population are classified as disabled, according to the 2000 Census. Unemployment for people with disabilities is approximately 60 percent.

Throughout the month of October, there are planned a number of activities to promote Disability Employment Awareness Month, including a series of local events where State agencies, private sector businesses and local disability organizations will promote and discuss the work potential of people with disabilities, educate businesses as to ADA requirements as well as the new technology available to assist people with disabilities in the workplace.

“Disability Employment Awareness Month is an opportunity to work with private employers, business leaders and public officials to promote employment and economic opportunities for people with disabilities, and ensure that more workplaces have access to the resources and technology that enable people with disabilities to join the workforce,” said Cathy Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities.

To learn more, employers and individuals with disabilities can contact the Maryland Department of Disabilities at 410-767-3660 or visit the web site at www.mdod.state.md.us.

White Cane Safety Day

Governor Martin O’Malley proclaimed October 15, 2007 as White Cane Safety Day in Maryland.

“In Maryland we believe strongly in encouraging and enabling people who are blind or who have low vision to participate fully in the social and economic life of the state, ensuring their rights to full and equal access to public places, employment, housing, accommodations and education,” said Governor O’Malley.

As a part of the Maryland White Cane Safety Day, Marylanders are encouraged to keep safe and functional the streets, highways, sidewalks, walkways, public buildings, facilities and other public places such as accommodations, amusement and resorts or places to which the public is invited.

White Cane Safety Day is also an opportunity to promote awareness, courtesy and special consideration to people who are blind or have low vision and offer assistance to these individuals on appropriate occasions.
About 400 Maryland high school students with disabilities will participate in enhanced career assessments, paid job experiences, support services and leadership activities thanks to a $2.9 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to the Maryland State Department of Education.

The grant creates the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative, which will lead state and local agencies to provide uninterrupted, collaborative career services that begin in early high school, continue after graduation and into the first few months of permanent employment.

The Governor’s Interagency Transition Council for Youth with disabilities will provide ongoing oversight and guidance for the project. The Council is co-chaired by Catherine Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and Robert Burns, Assistant State Superintendent, Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). Local school systems and their partners will apply for sub-grants in order to participate in the project.

Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative will have significant impact on students as they and their families prepare for meaningful careers and independent living.

Maryland’s students with disabilities face the same barriers to success as other students nationwide. The drop-out rate for youth with disabilities is nearly 60 percent higher than youth without disabilities. Post-secondary education enrollment lags nearly 80 percent behind non-disabled classmates. Employment rates for young adults with disabilities are low, especially for those who drop out of school and who have significant disabilities.

A key feature of the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative is a public/private partnership between DORS and TransCen, Inc. of Rockville. TransCen, Inc. is recognized nationally as a leader in providing innovative services to youth with disabilities.

The Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative will ensure that each student has as many work-related experiences as possible, including paid employment and internships. Work experience, especially paid work, is the strongest predictor of post-secondary employment success for youth with disabilities. This is regardless of disability label or intensity of special education services. The collaboration model also provides for family involvement, self-advocacy and independence of individuals with disabilities. To find out more about DORS, visit www.dors.state.md.us.
MDOD Launches EID Outreach Project
(cont. from page 1)

will partner with other agencies to increase enrollment in EID and use of other work incentives. The project will provide training to a predetermined group of state and private agencies about EID to encourage them to refer people to the project who might be eligible.

Benefits InfoSource and the Benefits Resource Center, Maryland’s Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) agencies, will also partner with MDOD to identify people served by the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and employment service providers who may be eligible for EID and other work incentives.

MDOD will help people apply for EID while the WIPA agencies will assist them to use work incentives such as the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS), Blind Work Expenses (BWE) and Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE). PASS, BWE and IRWE enable people to receive higher cash benefits from Social Security while working to help pay for work-related expenses.

The project is currently recruiting interns to assist with the outreach efforts, contacting people who may be eligible for EID and helping them complete applications. If you are interested in learning more about the internships, contact the EID Intern Coordinator, CarLa Bryant at 443-514-5034 (voice), 1-800-637-4113 (voice/TTY) or send an email to eid@mdod.state.md.us.

The EID project will also be providing training in the future, after the initial priority action steps have been completed. To request that your organization or agency be placed on the waiting list for trainings, email eid@mdod.state.md.us and include your name, organization, mailing address, email address, phone number and the number of anticipated attendees for a training.

Dalto, Bryant Head EID Enrollment Initiative

**Michael Dalto**, the Project Director, has trained and assisted hundreds of people with disabilities, families and professionals to use work incentives over the past 18 years. Michael served as director of MDOD’s Maryland Technology Assistance Program (MD TAP) since 2004, and he founded the Assistive Technology Loan Program for MD TAP in 1999.

Michael can be contacted at:

443-514-5922 (voice)  
1-800-637-4113 (voice/TTY)  
mdalto@mdod.state.md.us

**CarLa Bryant**, the EID Intern Coordinator, supervised residential program staff at Target, Inc. in Carroll County from 2005 – 2007. Prior to that, she worked for ten years as a Home Life Administrator for the Milton Hershey School in Pennsylvania. CarLa holds a master’s degree in Human Services Management from McDaniel College.

CarLa can be contacted at:

443-514-5034 (voice)  
1-800-637-4113 (voice/TTY)  
eid@mdod.state.md.us

“*The Employed Individuals with Disabilities program is the most powerful work incentive for people with disabilities created in Maryland in decades.***”

Cathy Raggio
EID Myths vs. Facts

Myth: People with disabilities CAN’T work
Fact: People with all sorts of disabilities can and do work. From Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was President of the United States while using a wheelchair to Fred Beam, a dancer who is deaf who gets paid to dance all over the world. People with disabilities can work and now do not have to risk losing their critical health benefits.

Myth: There is a catch or “gotcha” to the Employed Individuals with Disabilities program.
Fact: There is no catch. The program is not time limited. As long as you are working and your income and assets are within the limits, you are eligible for the program.

Myth: There is a $75 fee just to apply for the EID.
Fact: There is no fee to apply for the EID. The $75 is for the first six months of coverage if the individual is determined eligible. If the individual is found to be not eligible for the program, the $75 is returned.

Myth: Someone who already receives Medicaid through another program can’t benefit from EID.
Fact: Most people who get Medicaid have very low limits on income and savings. If their earnings or savings increased, they would lose their Medicaid. Many of those people might qualify for EID, which lets them earn or save more and still keep Medicaid.

Employed Individuals with Disabilities Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the Employed Individuals with Disabilities program, an individual needs to:

- Be 18 – 64 years old;
- Live in Maryland;
- Be a U. S. citizen or, in some cases, an alien (if legally admitted for permanent residence, granted asylum, admitted as a refugee, serving in or honorably discharged from the U. S. armed forces, etc.);
- Have been found eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) as an adult. If the person no longer receives that benefit, it must have been lost due to earnings;
- Be working for pay. There is no minimum earnings amount; even very low wages or self-employment earnings will qualify;
- Have “countable” income below $30,630 per year for an individual or below $41,070 per year for a married couple. Not all income counts. Less than half of gross earnings are counted, so someone whose primary income is earnings can receive much more than $30,630 per year (or $41,070 for a couple);
- Have “countable” resources below $10,000. Some resources don’t count, including the house you live in, any vehicles you own, and the first $4,000 in 401(k), 403(b), pension or Keogh plans.
One of the biggest challenges that businesses face today is the shortage of talented and skilled employees. It’s a challenge that the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) will address at a business roundtable that will be held on October 30.

Working with several other state agencies, MDOD will host the business roundtable for representatives of business to hear the value of individuals with disabilities in the workplace and to interact and provide interview and resume feedback for several job seekers.

“Individuals with disabilities represent a large untapped resource for businesses and by hosting this business roundtable, we hope to bring these two groups together for the benefit of both,” said Cathy Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities. “Our goal is to increase employer awareness of the skills and abilities of people with disabilities and highlight the many resources available to businesses to locate and hire qualified individuals.”

In Maryland, approximately 850,000 individuals or 18 percent of the total population are classified as disabled according to the 2000 Census. Unemployment for people with disabilities is approximately 60 percent.

If you are an employer who would like more information about the Business Roundtable, call the Maryland Department of Disabilities at 410-767-3660 or send an email to mdod@mdod.state.md.us.

Michael S. Chapman has been named as the new director of the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), part of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

“Michael Chapman will be a great asset for the DDA. He understands MD’s community based service system and he has personally observed best practices around the country,” said Cathy Raggio, Secretary of Maryland Department of Disabilities. “He has a deep personal commitment to ensuring that people with developmental disabilities and their families receive the highest quality services. Combined, these characteristics should enable him to effectively lead the DDA in creating positive outcomes for the people it serves.”

The Developmental Disabilities Administration’s mission is to provide leadership to assure the full participation of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in all aspects of community life. The agency works to promote the empowerment of individuals with development disabilities to access the quality supports and services necessary to foster personal growth, independence and productivity.

Before coming to DDA, Chapman served as president of Chesapeake Management Consulting, an organization that serves the developmental disabilities field. His previous experience also includes 16 years at the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore where he was assistant vice president of community programs and eight years as vice president of the nationally recognized Council on Quality and Leadership. He is a demonstrated leader in the provision of community based services, behavioral supports and person-directed community living options.
If you ask Karen Saba what is the most important part of her work for Mercy Corps, she will tell you it’s about empowering people with disabilities. This is particularly challenging in developing countries where people with disabilities are often forgotten, hidden or dismissed from all types of basic services.

Karen began fulfilling her personal mission of empowering people with disabilities in September 2005, when she left the safe confines of the United States to begin work in the war torn countryside of Iraq as a disability program manager for Mercy Corps, an international humanitarian aid and development organization that focuses on emergency relief services, economic development and civil societies.

Now a regional disability program manager for Mercy Corps, Karen Saba’s resume reads like someone with vast experience. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Modern Languages/Linguistics and History, a master’s degree in International Development, and speaks Arabic, French and English. Karen has published articles on education and disability rights; and has completed several research studies on people with disabilities in the areas of economic development, human rights and education.

Her work experience, which began 11 years ago with Independence Now, a non-profit organization based in Montgomery and Prince George’s counties, has included work for the Presidential Taskforce on Employment of Adults and Youths with Disabilities; and the World Bank Middle East and North Africa Region.

“Karen is one of those truly amazing people whose determination to make a contribution to the world will overcome any closed door she encounters,” said Cathy Raggio, founder of Independence Now and current Secretary of the Maryland Department of Disabilities.

A Bowie resident, Karen Saba came to Maryland from Egypt when she was 11 years old. Karen has cerebral palsy which affects her coordination and speech. Her family moved to Maryland so she could receive not only better medical care, but have an opportunity to go to college, have a career and become self-sufficient, something that her parents believed would not be possible in their native Egypt.

Currently in Jordan, Karen is working to reach out to the disability community, a challenge she admits in a region where disability services are not consumer driven and there is limited access to government funding.

At Mercy Corps, Karen focuses on integrating the needs of persons with disabilities into the agency’s own community development projects and setting an example for governments, nonprofits and businesses on how to include people with disabilities in every aspect of Middle Eastern life. That includes making sure fully accessible design is incorporated into new Mercy Corps funded buildings.

Karen and her colleagues also (cont. on page 8)
Karen Saba Working in the Middle East

( cont. from page 7)

For Karen, helping people with disabilities establish their own service programs, teaching them to become advocates for the disability community and building a strong disability-rights movement is the ultimate prize.

For Karen, helping people with disabilities establish their own service programs, teaching them to become advocates for the disability community and building a strong disability-rights movement is the ultimate prize, a proven mechanism for people with disabilities to win access to everything from public transportation to equal educational opportunities to job-training programs.

If you ask Karen about the barriers she’s experienced in her work, she will tell you there are very few. Professionally, she works with a staff she describes as idealistic and hard working; people who are comfortable being around different cultures and are a bit adventurous.

A self-described “very independent woman,” Karen misses the freedom of driving her own car, meeting with friends and family and being self-sufficient. In the Middle East, Karen is dependent on other people. She doesn’t drive and always takes an assistant with her everywhere she goes, a situation she says is fairly common in Arab society. Karen also misses having a disability support group that understands what she is going through on any given day.

If you ask Karen what is the one experience that had the most impact on her work and her life, she will tell you the story of a young girl she found in a convent orphanage in Cairo, Egypt in 1999. The girl had cerebral palsy. Her parents had abandoned her and migrated to the United States. The girl could not speak, move or express herself. She had no wheelchair, nor any alternative system for communicating. Karen believes that no one should live like this. This to her was a waste of human potential and a human rights atrocity.

Karen believes her work is important because there is an entire population around the world that has been forgotten; dismissed from all types of basic services. Her priority is to help people with disabilities get out into the community and become advocates for themselves and others. Karen calls it “inclusive development.”
Youth Transition Conference Scheduled for Nov 28-29

“Navigating the Road from School to Adulthood for all Youth with Disabilities in Maryland” will be held November 28-29, 2007. The conference is Maryland’s premier event for individuals responsible for and interested in the transition of youth with disabilities to successful and productive post-school outcomes.

The conference has been expanded this year to a two-day event featuring over 35 best and promising practice sessions from locally and nationally known transition experts. Sessions will discuss: career assessment, employment, community participation, independent living and healthy lifestyles, achievement, youth development and youth leadership, post-secondary, aligning accommodations and supports and knowledge building topics such as partnerships, legislation, cultural diversity, and transition process.

The conference will also feature “Listening Post” an opportunity for all to share transition hopes, dreams, challenges, issues and concerns one-on-one with Cathy Raggio, Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities and Robert A. Burns, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Rehabilitation Services.

The conference will be held at Martin’s West, 6817 Dogwood Road, Baltimore. For more information about the conference or to register on-line visit www.dors.state.md.us or www.mdtransition.org. Deadline for registration is November 16, 2007.

QUEST Interns Recognized at Special Ceremony

Twenty-five QUEST interns were recognized at a special ceremony on September 26, 2007.

The Governor’s QUEST Internship, created in 2001 by the Department of Budget and Management, provides meaningful work experience to individuals with disabilities while encouraging state government employment. The full and part time paid internships last up to six months and offer individuals with disabilities a chance to develop critical work skills.

To date, over 160 individuals receiving services through Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) have been provided with meaningful internship work experiences to help them succeed in their careers. These experiences also support job search activities such as interviewing, hands-on career exploration, skills development, socialization to the work environment, and networking activities. The results have been very encouraging – over 84 percent of these interns are now gainfully employed (many with State agencies), and the majority of those who are not yet employed are now actively engaged in their job searches.

If you are a Maryland State agency interested in hosting a QUEST intern, requests are now being accepted. Visit www.dbm.maryland.gov and type “QUEST” in the search box for additional information. If you are a Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) client interested in being a QUEST intern, please ask your local DORS field counselor for information, which will be available March 1, 2008. Applications will be accepted through March 31, 2008 for placement beginning in May 2008. Please visit www.dors.state.md.us to find local DORS field office.
Coming in November…

- Children with Disabilities
- Education