Psychiatric Disabilities in the Workplace

“Everyone can be successful with the right supports,” said Kim Bisset, one of the panelists at the recent program on “Psychiatric Disabilities in the Workplace” organized by the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD). She reminded the standing-room-only audience that we all use various supports to help us keep our lives organized and do our jobs effectively – everything from Day-Timers, to flexible schedules, to wireless laptops, and telecommuting.

Kim Bisset, Ed.D., is the Employment and Training Manager at the Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. The other two panelists on the program were Stan Eichner, JD, Director of the Disability Law Center, and Gregg Ames, MSW, of Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Often some of the greatest barriers to getting a job are the negative attitudes of others. Employment of individuals with psychiatric disabilities of helps the individual become self-supporting and helps reduce disability stigma.

Mr. Eichner, who moderated the panel presentation, noted that lack of physical and communication access, stereotypical assumptions, and rigid work rules often prevent equal opportunity in the job market for people with disabilities. He identified the responsibilities of employers to provide “reasonable accommodations” for job applicants and workers with disabilities throughout the hiring and employment process to “level the playing field.”

Under the ADA the requirement to provide reasonable accommodation is a dynamic, ongoing obligation; a person’s needs may change over the years or fluctuate from time to time. An employer cannot refuse a request just because the employee already receives an accommodation, received one in the past, or because she did not ask for the accommodation when she was first hired.

A reasonable accommodation can be any modification or adjustment to the work environment or the work schedule that will enable the individual to perform the essential functions of the job. Reasonable accommodations also apply to opportunities for career advancement and job benefits.

Mr. Eichner strongly suggested that employees with disabilities put their requests for reasonable accommodation in writing (even though it is not required), and that they follow up any verbal request with a written memo. This also applies to the employer’s response. A person’s request for accommodation should describe as simply as possible what his disability is, how the disability affects his ability to do a job, and one or more accommodations he thinks will help him perform the job.

Gregg Ames said that the key to providing quality services to employees with disabilities is to

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remember that everyone is unique. People with disabilities come in all shapes and sizes, and have diverse personalities, abilities, interests, needs and preferences just like everyone else. He spoke about the resources available at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission which has offices throughout the state.

Their broad range of services to individuals include: evaluation of work potential, guidance and counseling to identify skills and aptitudes, restorative treatment such as physical or speech therapy, and equipment such as wheelchairs, braces and hearing aids, training and education, vehicle and housing modifications including ramps, lifts and hand controls, and job placement assistance. MRC also works with employers to provide diverse, pre-screened candidates, on-the-job training, consultation on disability law and work site modifications, and tax incentives

Ms. Bisset stressed that it is important to help job seekers identify their interests, skills, abilities and the type of work environment they want in order to find a good job match. The goal of a successful workplace is to develop the strengths of every individual. She identified some of the supports that may be particularly helpful to individuals with psychiatric impairments.

- Define clear expectations
- Check in regularly to see how things are going
- Identify and review goals
- Build upon strengths
- Show appreciation; acknowledge contributions

Maureen Coyne, a member of the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities, shares this about her own work experience. She says, “Having a psychiatric disability is a struggle made more bearable by those understanding, sensitive folks we meet along the way.”

After college she taught school and served as a Vista Volunteer, then worked 16 years for Stop and Shop supermarkets. She says that her supervisors there were very understanding. These days Maureen volunteers as a part time cashier in the breakfast/lunch cafeteria at the Citywide Senior Center.

Maureen says, “I’d like to express my thanks to the staff of the kitchen at the Senior Dine Program. They have accepted me totally from the beginning of my job there a year and a half ago. Especially, Julie, the manager, who has listened, encouraged and accepted me in a real way that has helped me grow as a person. The rest of the staff, Gail, Carlina and Tako, have also, been very kind, supportive and fun to work with. I find the Citywide Senior Center, its clients and all the staff to be a true blessing.”

Contact information for the panelists and the organizations they represent follows.

**BU Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation**
940 Commonwealth Avenue West
Boston, MA 02215
617-353-3549
<www.bu.edu>

**Disability Law Center**
11 Beacon Street, Suite 925
Boston, MA 02108
617-723-8455 voice
<www.dlc-ma.org>

**Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission**
Vocational Rehabilitation Division
5 Middlesex Avenue, 3rd floor
Somerville, MA 02145
617-776-2662 voice, 617-776-4242 TTY
<www.mass.gov/mrc>

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**Brelsford Named to Access Post at MBTA**

CCPD chair Laura Brelsford was recently named to the position of System-Wide Accessibility Coordinator for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Ms. Brelsford, who previously worked as an investigator for the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), will be serving under Gary Talbot, who was appointed Assistant General Manager For System-Wide Accessibility at the
MBTA earlier this year. These two positions were created as part of the MBTA’s efforts to achieve compliance with the $310 Million settlement agreement with the Greater Boston Legal Services (see May/June 2006 AccessLetter)

Mr. Talbot expressed enthusiasm over Ms. Brelsford’s hiring, “We are excited to have Laura join our staff and be one of the team. Her job duties at MCAD required her to investigate civil rights cases and provide ADA/accessibility training so she was a natural fit for our organization. She has demonstrated a ‘refuse to lose’ attitude about life in general and typifies the meaning behind and the reason why the ADA… is so important.”

“In addition to the personal and professional experience that Laura brings to the table,” continued Mr. Talbot, “she will demonstrate on a daily basis that ‘disabled does not mean unable’ and as a result will help educate the larger organization and community of the possibilities for our population when we are given the opportunity to be fully integrated into society, raising the expectations for those with disabilities to the same as those without; this is the promise of the ADA.

Laura’s experience and demonstrated ability will help get us where we need to be and help make our goals a reality for all our customers and employees.”

Cambridge Disabilities Commission
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

We are looking for projects that:
• promote inclusion,
• help eliminate discrimination, or
• teach universal design

The Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities is offering small grants up to $5,000 each to support projects that promote inclusion and integration of people with disabilities, advance universal design, and help eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. Virtually any proposal will be considered if it promotes the full participation of people with disabilities and benefits the community of Cambridge at large.

For more information contact the Commission at 617-349-4692 voice, 617-492-0235 TTY or <cthompson@cambridgema.gov>

Upcoming Events of Interest to the Disability Community

Nov. 1-30 Employment for People with Psychiatric Disabilities – ONLINE WORKSHOP – covers job development and business partnerships. This live, web-based training sponsored by Institute for Community Inclusion is primarily for disability employment professionals. Cost is $25. For more information and to register, contact Drew Glazier at 617-287-4337, <andrewglazier@umb.edu>.

Nov. 6 & 8 MDDA (Manic Depression & Depressive Association) Support Group at Mass. General Hospital meets every Tuesday and Thursday, 7-9 p.m. on the 4th floor in the Yawkey Building. Follow the signs. Meetings are free and open to public. For more information call 617-855-2795.

Nov. 7 Practices and Strategies for Employing People with Mental Health Disabilities will be the topic at the Annual Meeting of Resource Partnership, 8:00 – 10:30 a.m. in Quincy at Blue Cross Blue Shield on One Enterprise Drive. Keynote speaker Dr. Kyle Nash will share what it is like to live and work with a clinical depression, anxiety disorder and bipolar spectrum disorder. Panel will discuss stereotypes of people with mental health disabilities, disclosing a disability to an employer, and asking for reasonable accommodation. Registration is $75 for individuals, $40 for businesses. To register log onto <www.resourcepartnership.org> or contact Natalya Koshnitsky at 508-647-1722, x16 or <Natalya@resourcepartnership.org>.
Nov. 7  RSI (repetitive strain injury) Monthly Drop-in Support & Information Meeting (no registration is necessary) on first Wednesday of each month, 5:30 to 7 p.m. at 650 Beacon Street in Boston, 4th floor Conference Room, steps from the Kenmore Square MBTA station and near the Barnes and Noble Bookstore. RSI Action volunteers will answer questions and provide resources and support, including the opportunity to view our provider evaluation book. For more information, call 617-247-6827, or check website at <www.rsiaction.org>.

Nov. 7  Weekly support group for adults with LD/ADHD (learning disabilities & attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) meets in Cambridge near Harvard Square, 6 to 7:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Currently there are a few openings in this group, so if you are interested, contact Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117.

Nov. 7  Manic Depression & Depressive Association (MDDA) Bipolar Support Group meets every Wednesday evening, 7 to 9 p.m. at McLean Hospital in Belmont (Demarneffe Building, 1st floor lobby). Includes a lecture; 7 to 8 p.m., on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays. Call 617-855-3665 for more information.

Nov. 8  MFA Gallery talk on Vincent Van Gogh with ASL Interpretation for Deaf visitors plus verbal descriptions and tactiles for blind and low-vision individuals – This 11 a.m. talk, Secret van Gogh: A Masterpiece Under the Surface, discusses two pictures, “the Ravine” and the underlying painting, “Wild Vegetation.” The presentation will focus on Van Gogh’s themes and techniques and on the scientific examination of works of art. The talk is free with admission to the museum. For more information, call 617-369-3302 or <access@mfa.org>. The Museum of Fine Arts is located at 475 Huntington Avenue in Boston.

Nov. 8  Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting – 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment. Guest speaker: Jean Flatley McGuire, Assistant Secretary for Disability Policy and Programs for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

Nov. 9  CORI Training – A speaker from the Mass. Law Reform Institute will explain the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) document, how such a record impacts people seeking jobs and public housing, and how to get a CORI corrected or sealed. The program will be at the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza in Boston, 1-3 p.m. and is sponsored by Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) and Resource Partnership, two organizations that work with people with disabilities. For more information contact BCIL at 617-338-6665 voice or 617-338-6662 TTY.

Nov. 13  Boston Voice Users is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. They meet 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at MIT in Building 2, Rm.135. To find out more about meetings and discussions go to <www.bostonvoiceusers.org>.

Nov. 14  FREE Flu Shots for Cambridge residents at City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Ave. from 10 a.m. – 12 noon. The 2007 Flu Clinic Schedule is available at <www.cambridgepublichealth.org>.

Nov. 14  Universal Design Symposium by Adaptive Environments and its New England ADA Center will take place during the Build Boston construction industry trade show at the Seaport World Trade Center, 200 Seaport Boulevard in Boston. Workshops run from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. and cover topics on Neuroscience and Design, Healthcare Design that Cares, Workplaces that Work for Everyone, and Customer Centric Public Transit Design. Package cost is $420 or you may choose to register for individual sessions. To register, log onto <www.buildboston.com/eh_univdessymp.asp>.

Nov. 15  LD/ADHD Task Force for Adults with Learning Disabilities / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is sponsored by Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and meets at MRC State headquarters, 27-48 Wormwood Street in Boston (south of Fort Point Channel) in the 6th floor conference room. Business meeting from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information contact Angelica Sawyer at 617-661-3117 voice, 617-497-5257 fax. There is no December meeting.
Nov. 15 Annual Meeting of Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL) will be held at the State Transportation Building, 2nd floor, 10 Park Plaza in Boston starting at 6 p.m. Dr. Jean Flatley McGuire, Assistant Secretary for Disability Policy and Programs in the Patrick administration will be the guest speaker. To RSVP or indicate your need for accommodations, contact David Sternburg at BCIL, 617-338-6665, x223 or <dsternburg@bostoncil.org>.

Nov. 15 Diabetes and Work – 20.6 million adults in the United States over the age of 20 have diabetes; an additional 54 million are diagnosed with pre-diabetes. Attend this 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. conference at the Radisson Hotel, 200 Stuart Street in Boston to learn strategies for successful employment while living with this disease. Keynote speaker is Michael Weiss, former president of American Diabetes Association. FREE but space is limited. Registration DEADLINE is November 9. Contact the Institute for Community Inclusion at 617-287-4300 voice, 617-287-4350 TTY or <www.communityinclusion.org>.

Nov. 15 Autism Support Group – meets the third Thursday of each month at the Central Square Branch Library, 45 Pearl Street in Cambridge, 6:30-8:30 p.m. For more information contact Lorraine Iacopucci at 978-624-2304 or <liacopucci@nsarc.org>.

Nov. 20 Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1 to 3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.

Nov. 28 Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA meets 1–3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room #2. Call 617-973-7507 voice, or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information, to request Interpreters, or confirm date and time. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.

Nov. 29 FREE Flu Shots for Cambridge residents at Citywide Senior Center, 806 Mass. Avenue, 9-11 a.m. The 2007 Flu Clinic Schedule is available at <www.cambridgepublichealth.org>.

December 5 RSI Monthly Drop-in Group – 5:30 p.m. first Wednesday of month, see Nov. 7 for details

December 5 Streets for People: Best Practice in Design and Materials – presentation by Livable Streets Alliance and Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD) at Adaptive Environments, 200 Portland Street in Boston at 6:00 p.m. To RSVP, request accommodations or more information contact 617-695-1225, x235 or <mparente@ihcd-ae.org>. Fee: $30 members / $50 others.

December 5 Manic Depression & Depressive Association (MDDA) Bipolar Support Group meets every Wednesday evening, 7 to 9 p.m. at McLean Hospital in Belmont (See Nov. 7 for details.)

December 6-7 Adults with Asperger’s Syndrome: Using Language to Build Social Skills in the Workplace – This 2-day workshop at Espousal Retreat Center in Waltham is geared for adults with AS and employment specialists, rehab counselors and job coaches. Presenter, Elsa Abele, will cover how to explicitly teach adults these skills. Cost is $265 for members of Asperger’s Association of New England (AANE), $300 for non-members; financial assistance for adults and parents of adults with AS living in Mass. may be available through Mass. Developmental Disabilities Council. Contact Harold Lieberman at 617-770-7676, X115 ASAP to inquire. Registration with payment is required by Nov. 29. Call 617-393-3824 to register or get information at <www.aane.org>.

December 6 FREE Flu Shots for Cambridge residents at Windsor Street Health Center, 2nd Floor Large Conference Room, 119 Windsor Street (Area IV Neighborhood), 5:30-7:30 p.m. The 2007 Flu Clinic Schedule is available at <www.cambridgepublichealth.org>

December 7 Climb and Dine at MetroRock Climbing Center in Everett. Learn to climb or improve your basic skills in a fun indoor environment; equipment and individual instruction by skilled leaders customized to your needs; sponsored by Outdoor Explorations (OE). $40 fee includes all gear, pizza supper and transportation from T stops or OE in Medford. Scholarships are available. For more information or to register, call 781-395-4999 voice, 781-395-4184 TTY or <info@outdoorexp.org>.
December 11  **Boston Voice Users** is a group for people who use speech recognition or dictation software. Meets 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. second Tuesday of the month (Nov. 13 listing for details.)

December 13  **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities monthly meeting and Holiday Gathering**
– 51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 – 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment. Bring some refreshments to share and plan on time to socialize with old and new friends.

December 18  **Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) monthly meeting on 3rd Tuesday of month, 1-3 p.m. at the State House, Room A-1, in Boston.**

December 19  **Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA** meets 1–3:30 p.m. at State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, Conference Room #2. Call 617-973-7507 voice, or 617-973-7089 TTY for more information, to request Interpreters, or confirm date and time. Due to security measures, please bring proper identification to gain entrance to all meetings.

December 20  **FREE Flu Shots for Cambridge residents at Windsor Street Health Center**, 2nd Floor Large Conference Room, 119 Windsor Street (Area IV Neighborhood), 5:30-7:30 p.m. The complete 2007 Flu Clinic Schedule is available at <www.cambridgepublichealth.org>

December 20  **Autism Support Group** in Cambridge – See Nov. 15 listing for details

January 10  **Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) monthly meeting** –
51 Inman Street, 2nd floor Conference Room, 5:30 to 7 p.m. with opportunity for public comment.

January 17  **LD/ADHD Task Force for adults with Learning Disabilities / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (See Nov. 15 listing for details.)

January 23  **Making Sense of Housing Accessibility Requirements** – presentation by Fair Housing, Deborah A. Ryan & Assoc., and New England ADA Center at Adaptive Environments, 200 Portland Street in Boston at 6:00 p.m. To RSVP, request accommodations or more information contact 617-695-1225, x235 or <mparente@ihcd-ae.org>. Fee: $30 members / $50 others.

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**Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities**

The Commission was established in 1979 to act as a clearinghouse on disability and access issues throughout the City of Cambridge. We strive to raise awareness of disability matters, to eliminate discrimination, and to promote equal opportunity for people with all types of disabilities - physical, mental and sensory. The Commission provides information, referral, guidance, and technical assistance to individuals and their families, employers, public agencies, businesses and private non-profit organizations.

The goal of our 11-member citizen advisory board, comprised primarily of individuals with disabilities, is to maximize access to all aspects of Cambridge community life. Our regularly scheduled Commission meetings, which always include an opportunity for public comment, are held at 5:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month.
Access Notice: The City of Cambridge and Commission for Persons with Disabilities do not discriminate on the basis of disability. This newsletter is available in e-mail, large print and other alternative formats upon request. To add your name to our mailing list, to inquire about alternative formats, or for information about other auxiliary aids and services or reasonable modifications in policies and procedures, contact CCPD.

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We welcome your articles, comments, criticisms, and suggestions. Write us!

Read past issues on our website: www.cambridgema.gov/DHSP2/disabilities.cfm

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