

## From the Commissioner's Desk

### Autism and DRS Services

As I write this item, I just finished an article in the April 3 issue of PARADE Magazine titled, "[Autism's Lost Generation](#)." It features a young lady in Maryland reaching her 21st birthday and realizing that the services she received in her school years will soon be over. The article notes the dearth of vocational services around the nation for this specific population, now growing at an alarming rate of 1 in 110 children, including 1 in 70 boys, diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.



To deal with increasing needs for services, DRS has undertaken a few new initiatives to increase our capacity to work with youth and adults with ASD. The most exciting effort has been our increased use of Project SEARCH. This model takes 6-8 high school students with disabilities—often including those with ASD—who spend their senior year interning at a host employer site, often a hospital. In one Project SEARCH program that partners DRS, VCU's Regional Rehabilitation Training Center, Henrico County Public Schools,

and Bon Secours Richmond Health System's St. Mary's Hospital, we are seeing great success. In Year One, *all* of the students were offered jobs at the end of their internship with most working 20 hours per week. DRS plans to spread these projects around the Commonwealth. There are currently 12 initiatives either in operation or in a planning stage with implementation this year or next.

We are also seeing an increased number of clients presenting for DRS services with a disability covered under the Autism Spectrum. In 2010, there were 484 new applicants with ASD, compared to 128 in 2004; that is a 275 percent increase in new applicants. Our staff have benefited from expanded training due to the RRTC grant noted earlier and another grant received by the Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center. Creative projects are also in play with a few employers like TecAccess where new opportunities are being offered.

As **April National Autism Awareness Month** kicks off, what better way to celebrate than working with DRS and our partners to create job opportunities for these new

members of our Commonwealth's workforce. We value our Champion employers who support disability employment, but we need more employers willing to work with our staff to successfully include persons with autism in their workforce.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in hiring our clients, including those with ASD, please visit [www.vdrs.org](http://www.vdrs.org) or email [communications@drs.virginia.gov](mailto:communications@drs.virginia.gov). An article on page 3 provides useful tips for working and supervising employees with autism.

**Jim Rothrock,**  
DRS Commissioner

## Contents

<b>Autism and DRS Services</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Tax Incentives for Hiring People with Disabilities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Researchers Seek Participants for Study on Reasonable Accommodations</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>New Hiring Toolkit for Federal Agencies</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Workplace Supports for Individuals with ASD</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Free Webinars for Employers</b>	<b>3</b>

## Tax Incentives for Hiring People with Disabilities



**T**ax season is in full swing. Are you taking advantage of the tax credits available for employing people with disabilities and for making your place of business accessible to all your patrons? Below are three financial incentives that can provide you with some tax relief.

### Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)—[IRS Form 5884](#)

The WOTC provides businesses with an incentive to hire individuals from targeted groups with a high unemployment rate or other special employment needs. The credit is up to 40 percent of the first \$6,000, or up to \$2,400, in wages paid during the first 12 months for each new hire.

### Small Business/Disabled Access Credit—[IRS Form 8826](#)

This is a tax credit for eligible small businesses that pay or incur expenses to provide access to persons with disabilities. For small businesses that earned a maximum of \$1 million in revenue or 30 or fewer full-time employees, the credit is 50 percent of expenditures over \$250, not to exceed \$10,250, for a maximum benefit of \$5,000.

### Barrier Removal Tax Deduction—[Publication 535: Business Expenses](#)

Businesses are eligible for a tax deduction of \$15,000 per year for the removal of architectural or transportation barriers to comply with applicable accessibility standards. Small businesses can use these incentives in combination with the Disabled Access Credit if the expenditures incurred qualify under both Section 44 and Section 190.

*Be sure to check with the IRS for updates to any of the above forms.*

## New Hiring Tool for Federal Agencies to Increase Employment of People with Disabilities

**I**n July 2010, President Obama marked the 20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act by signing [Executive Order 13548](#), which aims to transform the disability employment landscape within the federal government. The directive calls on federal departments and agencies to increase the recruitment, hiring and retention of people with disabilities in the coming years.

The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy created a toolkit that can assist federal agencies in their efforts to increase the employment of people of disabilities. The kit guides users through five key steps toward making agencies a model employer, from initial recruitment to ongoing support and retention of employees with disabilities. [Access the Toolkit](#)

## Seeking Employers and HR Professionals to Participate in Research Study on Reasonable Accommodations

Researchers at the University of Maryland, in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, are looking for employers and human resource professionals who are interested in accommodations in the workplace to complete a short online survey about their perceptions on workplace accommodations.

After completing the survey, you may opt to participate in a raffle for a chance to win a \$25 Amazon gift card.

In addition, you will assist researchers learn more about how to improve the workplace accommodation process. If interested, go to <http://sgiz.mobi/s3/DBTAC>.

If you have any further questions about the study or need alternative formats of the survey, please call (301) 405-9126 or email [dbtac07@umd.edu](mailto:dbtac07@umd.edu).



## FREE Webinar Series

### Top Practices for Disability Inclusion



A four-part webinar series has been developed for businesses, through partnership of the ADA National Network, American Association of People with Disabilities, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation–National Employment Team, and the US Business Leadership Network. The webinar series is supported by the Burton Blatt Institute–Southeast.

The **FREE** webinars (listed below) will take place in February, April, June and September and will focus on leading practices that advance disability inclusion within business. To register or learn more about each webinar topic, please visit <http://sedbtac.org/webinars/index.php>.

1. **Flexible Workplaces Benefit Everyone, Especially Persons with Disabilities.** Feb. 17, 2011 from 1:30– 3:00 p.m. ET (Note: This is a past event. Session notes are available at <http://sedbtac.org/webinars/eventTemplate.php?eventid=530>.)
2. **Building the Corporate Business Case for Including Disability-Owned Businesses in Supplier Diversity.** Apr. 21 from 1:30–3:00 p.m. ET
3. **Creating a Model with Business: Common Sense Approaches to Access and Accommodations.** June 16, from 1:30–3:00 p.m. ET
4. **On-line Employment Applications and Website Accessibility.** Sept. 15, from 1:30–3:00 p.m. ET

## Workplace Supports for Individuals with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder

*\*Adapted from article in Job Training & Placement Report, Apr. 2011, impactpublications.com*

**D**ue to the nature of the disability, persons with ASD can display initial difficulties adapting to their new job duties or the social interaction that takes place within the workplace culture. However, there are a variety of workplace supports that can be effective for individuals with ASD.

Gradual introduction of an employee with autism into the work situation is often advised. In other words, it's probably better to teach portions of the job and build up to teaching the entire job in the first two weeks.

As much as possible, individuals with ASD need to be provided with clear, specific job descriptions. Have pictorial flow charts or organizational charts. This is a visual representation of a "chain of command," and can be useful for a worker with autism, as he/she will better understand who to ask for help. It is *critical* to provide immediate, clear, and open feedback for workers with ASD.

Moreover, a worker with autism will try to establish a work routine for a given task right away. If that routine is positive and productive, it will work. Conversely, if it is not a positive routine, an effort should be made to break it as *quickly* as possible. If a supervisor lets a certain routine go for a few days, it will be difficult to re-teach the given tasks. As a result, supervisors need to provide more frontend supervision for workers with ASD. Getting an employee with autism into good routines immediately benefits everyone. It often helps to conduct coworker and supervisor education about Autism Spectrum Disorders. That is, assuming that an individual with ASD is OK with talking about his/her disability and that he/she wants other persons in the workplace to understand the disability. If the worker with autism is open to talking about his/her disability with others, then co-workers can begin to understand how they can be social mentors to help navigate the social "politics" of the workplace.

In February, noted author, animal scientist, and autism advocate Temple Grandin presented at a conference sponsored by Cargill, 3M and Best Buy where she spoke about the business benefits of hiring workers with autism. An article titled, "[Autistic workers can help firms grow](#)" by Minnesota reporter Dee DePass details Grandin's views and what employers are saying they've gained from hiring this talented group of workers.

*"If I could snap my fingers and be nonautistic, I would not. Autism is part of what I am."*

*- Temple Grandin*