

## Working with a Disability

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>> Welcome to Disabilities at Work Radio where every week we explore issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the employment of people with disabilities. We feature employers that go beyond compliance in supporting people with disabilities in the workplace and elsewhere. We bring you prominent members of the business community, service providers, government officials, researchers, educators and people who successfully manage their disability and careers. Join us now for Disabilities at Work.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Hello. I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto today. And welcome to Disabilities at Work Radio here

on the Voice America Business Network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities at Work explores issues, ideas, and initiatives and innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and discusses them with prominent members of the business, government, and disability communities.

Disabilities at Work Radio is brought to you this week by two very distinguished organizations. Both are dedicated to improving the lives of the disabilities. The first is the Kessler Foundation, and the second is the New Jersey Division of Disability Services, whose director happens to be our guest today.

The issue we are going to be exploring today is called DiscoverAblity. It is a project geared towards helping people with disabilities work, earn and thrive. And those are going to be three of the main topics of our conversation today with our various guests.

Our first guest is Bill Ditto and he is the director of disabilities services at the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services. Bill has been with the organization since its inception 13 years ago, and he has spent his career developing and administering social service programs, many of them for people with disabilities. And I'll be talking about Bill about this terrific program today. So welcome, Bill.

>> BILL DITTO: Thanks very much.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Can you describe for our audience what

DiscoverAbility is? Tell us a little bit about the program.

>> BILL DITTO: Certainly. DiscoverAbility is New Jersey's strategic plan for improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. As you are probably aware, the statistical data shows us that people with disabilities have a much higher rate of unemployment than do their non-disabled peers. And New Jersey, like many states across the country, is very interested in reversing that trend and making use of a valuable resource, that is, workers with disabilities. And so the DiscoverAbility plan pulls together government, business, the advocacy community, consumers and professionals from the field of employment placement together to sort of change and recreate our system so that it works more effectively and efficiently.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What was the impetus for the DiscoverAbility program?

>> BILL DITTO: Actually the federal government began offering states grants back in 2001 to improve the state infrastructure for workers with disabilities or potential workers with disabilities, and New Jersey was one of the initial states to receive a grant and we have continued to receive those grants right up until this year. So, we have been very fortunate to have that federal support which helped us to really move forward with a lot of projects that we wanted to accomplish and lot of things that we envisioned as being very important.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Do you know what other states have also

received that federal grant?

>> BILL DITTO: Actually, almost every state in the country has now had the benefit of receiving a grant from the centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service in the Federal Department of Health of Human Services, and some of the states are in what we call a development phase in which we are getting their programs together and other states, like New Jersey, are in what we call the comprehensive phase. We have developed a plan, we have created work incentives for people with disabilities, and we really have begun the process of changing our system and making the system work more effectively.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So it the program called DiscoverAbility in other states as well?

>> BILL DITTO: No. That's a very good point. We called our program DiscoverAbility. Every state has their own name for the program which they have come up with. We chose DiscoverAbility, and that, by the way, is one word with a capital A for ability in the middle, um, because we had created a Medicaid buy-in program for workers with disabilities which we called WorkAblity. So we thought DiscoverAbility would be a great name for our plan and would sort of fit the two pieces together.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So the idea is kind of discover the untapped abilities in the workforce out there?

>> BILL DITTO: That's exactly it. If we are getting that

message across to folks, and that is exactly what we hoped for.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So, what's in the plan?

>> BILL DITTO: Well, the plan itself contains a series of goals that the state hopes to accomplish over time. And the plan itself, although it was done as a printed document, is really meant to be sort of a road map for improving the system.

And so, there are some things that are in that plan that we may act on now and may be working on now and are, in fact, working on now, and there are other things that, you know, we may do at a later point, some things which we may later feel are unnecessary that we don't even need to do. But the basic goals of the plan are really to make it possible for people with disabilities to locate satisfying meaningful employment that involves a career and that involves the possibility of having different positions, getting different jobs in different places over a period of time.

Traditionally, unfortunately, what people have tended to count in terms of employment for people with disabilities is how many people get a job. Well, getting a job is part of it, but for most of us our first job has not been our lifelong job. And so, we are concerned in this plan with making sure that people are entering a career pathway and that they are not just getting a job, but that they are also getting satisfaction from being in the world of work.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So how do people with disabilities find

employment through DiscoverAbility?

>> BILL DITTO: Well, DiscoverAbility, again, is an overall plan. We have systems in our state. We have one stop career centers which you are going to be hearing a little bit more about later in the program today, and we also have a vocational rehabilitation agency. We have a number of key elements or components and in addition to that, we have the support of a wonderful business leadership network, we call it the BLN, which is part of our state Chamber of Commerce. So, working together, as a group, we are creating opportunities for people to locate suitable employment and perhaps more importantly, to prepare for the types of jobs that are in demand today and will be in demand in the next ten to twenty years.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, you mentioned helping people find career paths. Is this for adults only or does this reach down into school aged?

>> BILL DITTO: It reaches down into school age. We work very closely with the State Department of Education. They have in New Jersey, a wonderful series of conferences each year around the state called Dare to Dream. They are specifically aimed at students who have been in special education or who have been classified as having a disability within their school district and really promoting them -- really promoting the idea of work and helping them to understand what the options and what the opportunities are.

So, yes, we are very concerned with transition. We have a section in our DiscoverAbility plan that addresses the whole issue of transition and improving the transition process.

Every high school student with a disability should have an employment goal, whether that is immediate employment after school or after attending some sort of postsecondary program.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So you can actually help students with disabilities get into postsecondary programs?

>> BILL DITTO: Exactly. And we have found, much to our delight, that a number of the community colleges and four-year colleges here in the state of New Jersey have developed special programs for students that have disabilities, including students with intellectual disabilities, to help prepare them for work. And to earn college credits or to, if not that, at least get some direct skill training from those postsecondary resources.

So people can take different paths depending upon what it is they that are interested in doing. Some people need to get some sort of postsecondary education in order to be prepared for a job. There are other types of jobs that people can sort of enter directly from leaving high school and can go right into paid employment. And that's a personal choice.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. And are you communicating with the business world as well to let them know that you are providing opportunities for these individuals?

>> BILL DITTO: Yes, that's where the Business Leadership Network has become such a vital link for us and we are so delighted that the State Chamber of Commerce Foundation has actually taking the lead with regard to this, because they really communicate with the business community, and we are working on all sorts of really exciting web based sites.

We are doing programs like the program we are doing today, you know, to get the word out about the possibilities that exist and to keep employers aware of the fact that there are qualified individuals with disabilities who are out there who can really contribute to the success of business.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, you had mentioned you were working on improving this system, when you say system --

>> BILL DITTO: The system is really that whole network of government supports and services that most people with disabilities rely on and that is likely the way that they are going to begin to explore the options in terms of employment. So obviously, that starts with the school, where we hope that students are getting opportunities for job sampling, that they are getting some perhaps internship experience, that they are getting a chance to find out more about what the options are and what the different career paths could be.

Then we have the system of vocational rehabilitation, which helps to pay for the services and supports that people may need in order to get ready for employment. And then the

one-stop centers that are operated by our State Department of Labor and Workforce Development, which are actually very important in terms of the placement of people in jobs.

So we are trying to make sure that all of those systems are linked together so that people don't get into sort of a disconnect as I call it where, you know, you finish high school and then suddenly you are sitting at home and you are not doing anything. Or, you know, you go through vocational rehabilitation, but then at the end of it you don't really have a job. We want to make sure that each of these systems connects with the other, and that we make those connections as easy for people as possible. And we make the path to gainful productive successful employment as easy as we can for people.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, this is not just a New Jersey problem, so.

>> BILL DITTO: Oh, no.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Could you share where people might be able to find a copy of the plan?

>> BILL DITTO: Well, the copy of our plan, the DiscoverAbility plan, is available on our division website. And is that [www.NJ.gov/humanservices/dds](http://www.NJ.gov/humanservices/dds), for Division of Disability Services. And if you go to that Division of Disabilities Services homepage, you will see a link to the DiscoverAbility plan.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Bill, thanks so much for that information.

We are going to need to take a short break, but when we come back, we are going to be joined by a gentleman who has been living and working with quadriplegia for the last 23 years, both as an employee and as an entrepreneur, and what his experiences have taught him. So stay with us. I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities at Work Radio here on Voice America's Business Network, the show this week is brought to you by the Kessler Foundation and the State of New

Jersey's Division of Disabilities Services.

I'm Donna Custard and I have been speaking with Bill Ditto, director of the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services. Bill and I are now going to be joined by John Fig. He is a senior project analyst at Wakefern Food Corporation. John was an avid bicyclist and he had a terrific adventure back in the early 80s. He rode his bicycle from New Jersey to Texas, a couple thousand of miles, I believe, and there he earned his degree in economics from the University of Texas. But in 1987, he suffered a driving accident that resulted in his quadriplegia, but after listening to your -- his story, I think you will agree with me that it doesn't seem to slow him down at all. So, John, welcome to the show today.

>> JOHN FIG: Thank you for having me.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Thanks so much for being with us. Can you take us through some of your activities prior to your accident in 1987?

>> JOHN FIG: Oh, gosh, um.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What were some of the things that you used to do?

>> JOHN FIG: Um, actually water skiing, Frisbee, things most young guys like to do. Bicycling, I was a big bicyclist, as you mentioned, I bicycled from here to Texas. I liked to travel. I studied Japanese, actually, for two years and spent some time in Japan with a friend I had met on my bicycle

adventure when we left and we crossed the Cape May Delaware Ferry I met him. So I bicycled in Japan also.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow. Amazing. And then explain a little bit about what happened after that in 1987.

>> JOHN FIG: Well, actually I was out with friends on a boat. I had gotten out of graduate school and I came back up here and I was interviewing with some financial services firms. I went out with a couple of friends of mine on a boat and we went for a ride. The boat got stuck and I went in to help pull it out and instead of jumping in feet first I went in head first, and hit my head, broke my neck and that resulted in my quadriplegia.

I spent six months of rehab. I had - coincidentally, at Kessler, the premier place around here for rehab. And it was there actually that through the vocational rehab counselor I met someone named Donna Kozberg who works at Lift Incorporated, which is a nonprofit organization that helps individuals with severe physical disabilities get jobs in the information technology industry. And she gave me a test, an aptitude test, and I passed and became a candidate for their program.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And then what did you do after that? Did you find a job right away?

>> JOHN FIG: No, in fact, I was still going to rehabilitation and there were six months in in-patient and a year as an out-patient, so I was spending time doing that, but I had, you

know, my parents, when I came home, I lived here and one of the things that we never had was an expectation of me not working. So the first thing my dad, at his place, got me doing spreadsheets and things for them, and then another friend who worked at the Direct Marketing Association who got me to do some things for them. So I was always keeping busy.

But then down at [inaudible] actually five or six months after I got out of in-patient, my in-patient stay, and offered me an opportunity at Wakefern. So it wasn't too long thereafter that I got involved back into working.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about some of your key experiences that you had with working as a person with a disability?

>> JOHN FIG: Well, it's been -- it's been very enjoyable. I will say the process of getting a job was, I mean going through that whole process with Luke was an experience. I mean we started off with training and one of the big things with, actually even getting employment, is where do you start and getting your foot in the door, and actually I had quite a bit of help through a number of things, some of the things that Bill mentioned, um, the Division of Vocational Rehab was a big help. Donna's program, the Lift Program, actually the six-month training program that you work with a mentor at you company that the company that you are going work for, then a year as a consult with them and after a year, they actually

decide whether they are going to hire you on as full-time. So the training itself was paid for by the Division of Vocational Rehab, which was very helpful.

Wakefern, they took a -- took a step and helped by providing me with my work station at home, and also there is a program which Bill hadn't mentioned which he ran for quite a bit of time which is a personal assistant services program. And one of the things with being disability and working is that you have to worry about a lot of logics things and attendant care. And the PASP, we call it for short, allows someone who is disabled, you don't have to be on Medicaid, and working to get attendant care and it also covers nonmedical things, such as driving to work and taking care of other personal care needs.

So between the Wakefern, and PASP, and Division of Vocational Rehab and Lift, everything came together. As Bill had mentioned, it takes kind of a group effort lots of times to do things. And they all came together, and I was able to go through the training and then from then on it was, obviously, up to me to prove myself and get employed with them, with Wakefern.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: It seems that they all had connections to each other as well to help put you in touch with the right people and point you in the right direction. What do you think some of the biggest challenges people with disabilities might

face in going to work following an injury?

>> JOHN FIG: Well, as I said, logistically I think, and that's one of the duties of the PASP program. Quite often you need attendant care; and you need reliable attendant care just to take care of daily needs. I mean, ADL's, whatever as we call them -- for me I get up at 6:30 in the morning to get to work at 9:30. And I live seven miles from my job. So you have that whole thing that has to be taken care of. So once you can get that taken, you know, that under control, then it comes down to transportation that is another issue. That is a problem for people. I don't know, here we have some infrastructure with New Jersey transit to get people with disabilities to and from their job, but also the program allows me to have a van and have someone drive me.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Go ahead.

>> JOHN FIG: The other thing is really getting in the door of a company and having that first step and getting an interview.

>> BILL DITTO: I was just thinking, John, that maybe you would like to share with the audience, since it is a national audience, what is Wakefern? I happen to know because I live in New Jersey, but I'm not sure everyone does.

>> JOHN FIG: Yeah, and I'm sorry, you are right. I'll have to apologize to Wakefern, I'm sure, if they ever listen to this. But, um, Wakefern Food Corporation, we are based out of Keasbey, New Jersey, and the business community knows Wakefern

pretty well, but consumers in this area really know us better as ShopRite supermarkets. And what a lot of people don't know is that Wakefern is actually a cooperative, it is the largest retailer owned cooperative in the U.S., in fact. There are 46 members and we have over 200 ShopRite supermarkets that run generally from Maryland all the way up through Connecticut, and a number of operational divisions, procurement warehousing, transportation, logistics and finance, and my division, which is communications and information services. And we handle the hardware and software support for the other corporate and retail operations.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, John, you worked as an employee for other companies and you have also been an entrepreneur. Can you talk a little bit about the pros and cons of those two types of work experiences?

>> JOHN FIG: Well, there are similarities and there are differences. I think it depends really on your makeup. Someone who is on their own and you have your own business; you really need to be -- have quite a bit a self discipline. I mean, I think you do for any job, really, you should have to have self discipline, but for someone who is doing their own to have self discipline. And you really kind of have to know the numbers. I know I have talked to people, a lot of my friends have their own businesses and they are not disabled, and frankly, you need the same skills, whether you are disabled or

not disabled, to run your own business. You need to be organized, you really need to know the numbers. You have to have financial sense when you do things.

As far as working and having your own business, you can make your own hours and you have more flexibility in that regard, and in that there is no doubt. But on the flip side, you have a little less of a net underneath you as is the case with really anyone that has their own business. You kind of are flying by yourself. So you don't really have some of the support structures that you might with a company, certainly with respect to say, insurance or, you know, other aspects of working.

>> BILL DITTO: Now, I think, if I remember properly, you were running a home care agency, is that correct?

>> JOHN FIG: Yes.

>> BILL DITTO: How did it come to be that you decided to do that?

>> JOHN FIG: Well, the personal assistant services program where I get my attendant care, they -- actually in 1993, the IRS past a ruling where everyone that was on the assistance had to work for an agency or be hired by the county. Prior to that, they were giving them 1099s, so my aid who was going to have to find a job with an agency. My county had one agency that didn't pay very well. So I sat there for weekends and nights and put together some spreadsheets and break even points

and figured out how much money I could pay people and get them paid as much as I can and basically that was the philosophy behind the program -- behind my company. I really didn't make a lot of money at it, as you know, Bill. I just made the program.

>> BILL DITTO: But you did fulfill a need.

>> JOHN FIG: I did. And that was the purpose, really. And I think when people think about having their own business you really need to have a business plan and my business plan wasn't really to make lot of money. It was really to fulfill a need, as you said, to try to get my aid paid as much as -- and other assistants paid as much money as they could. And it worked out well. Now we have -- I don't know how many agencies in this county now, seven or so, that are contracted with them. And so, it fulfilled a need at that time and worked out well I think for everyone. I could have expanded it to other counties. There was a clamor in the beginning, but I had to make a decision as to which side of my bread was buttered on.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: John --

>> JOHN FIG: It was a full-time job and I liked it and they were very good, you know, and that's who I stuck with.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: John, thanks so much for sharing your story. We have to take another break. And, Bill, thanks for your interjections as well. I really appreciate it.

We have been talking today about DiscoverAbility and how

that program helps people with disabilities work, earn and thrive. We have just heard John's story about working. We are going to take a little break and when we come back, we will talk about the earnings portion of the program and various work incentives and programs to help people with disabilities get and keep a job. But before we go to the break, let me invite all of you to listen to Disabilities at Work Radio every Wednesday at noon Eastern Time and also to join our tweam at DisabilitiesAt. And also friend us on Facebook at Disabilities at Work. And if any of our listeners have comments or suggestions, you e-mail to them to [info@Disabilitiessatwork.org](mailto:info@Disabilitiessatwork.org). I'm Donna Custard, and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Hi, we are back on Voice America's Business Network. This is Disabilities at Work Radio and I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto.

Today's show is sponsored by the Kessler Foundation, which is dedicated to improving the lives of the disabled. It does so through the rehabilitation research done by the Foundation Research Center, and through the work of the Kessler Program Center which prepares the disabled for the demands of

the workplace. For more information, please visit [www.kesslerinstitute.org](http://www.kesslerinstitute.org).

Also sponsoring our show today is the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services, part of the State of New Jersey's Division of Human Services. The division focuses on helping people who have become disabled as adults so they can live more independently in their communities.

We have been talking today with Bill Ditto, director of the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services about the program and the three components which are work, earn and thrive. We have talked about the working component. We are going to go on and talk the earning component in just a moment.

But we would like to thank both of our sponsors, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disability Services, for their consideration in sponsoring this week's show.

So I'd like to welcome Bill Ditto back to the show, as well as Jan Goodman who is the disabilities program navigator about the services, supports and work incentives are available to help people with a disability get and keep a job. Jan, welcome to the show.

>> JAN GOODMAN: Good afternoon. Thank you for having me.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So can we start maybe with a little description about what it is that you do?

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Certainly. The Employment Training

Association Administration started the disability program, navigator Program in 2003 and the program has grown and there are several hundred DPNs like myself that work in the one stop career centers across the country. We are actually the link for customers with disabilities, making sure that they have access to employment services with the ultimate goal of helping those with disabilities obtain a meaningful job. For most of us, you know, work really gives us a sense of purpose, and for individuals who have challenges resulting from a disability, finding meaningful work is a challenge in and of itself.

In terms of the one stop career centers, they are part of the universal access system that combines local employment and training programs into easily accessible centers. So, rather than going to more than one location to find a job enroll in training or apply for compensation benefits, a customer can access several employment related services in just one stop, and that is probably how we got our name initially.

We are operated by work systems through Regional Workforce Investment Boards and we connect with local partners, including the vocational rehabilitation agencies and community colleges. Disability program navigators are located in the one stop centers and, again, we coordinate the resources for job seekers with disabilities and we need to insure that they receive the same services as their non-disabled counterparts.

Ideally, resources are blended and braided around a

customer with disabilities personal employment needs and we set up what we call an integrated resource team. It is a model that we try to follow where we are working with a diverse group of agencies and organizations such as our career center, the vocational rehabilitation agencies, mental health organizations, social services, private sector employers, and community colleges and vocational technical schools. This particular model works across multiple systems to leverage resources, coordinate the services and programs that an individual needs, and to try to reduce duplication to better serve the individual holistically.

Again, we conduct a lot of outreach through education and partnerships that are forged with the regional business communities to facilitate employment and placement for those in need. We are also responsible to serve as a main resource for federal, state and local private programs that impact individuals with disabilities and their integration into employment. We generally advise the one stop career staff on assistive equipment, provide trainings and conduct outreach to facilitate team building among partner agencies and service providers to get the most out of the money available to help our customers with disabilities.

We also work very closely with the business community to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities and promote them as a target audience that is really based more

on abilities than disabilities. So that's quite a lot.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: It is a lot.

>> JAN GOODMAN: But that is essentially what the DPN, or the Disability Program Navigators, are responsible for.

>> BILL DITTO: Donna, I think if I can interject for just a second, I think one of the nice things that I hear when I listen to the description is people are referred to as customers. And you know, that, I think, is really the sort of approach that shows the direction that we are hoping to move in and you can also see how the one stop becomes sort of the natural hub for people with and without disabilities. And one of the things that we stressed all along in New Jersey is this notion of having sort of a single point of entry for people that would be able to address, you know, locating employment, preparing for employment, you know, job seeking skills, et cetera. And that's what the one stop does.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah and, Bill, you had mentioned in the first segment a program through New Jersey called WorkAbility. Could you explain a little bit how the Disability Program Navigator fits in with WorkAbility?

>> BILL DITTO: Sure. WorkAbility is one of the tools that certainly Disability Program Navigators have available when they are working with individuals, as does really anyone in the employment or human services field. And, very simply, this is a program that was created in New Jersey in order to provide

people with health insurance coverage who have permanent disabilities and are employed.

National studies, done a number of years ago, showed that the major impediment to employment for people with disabilities was the loss of governmental health coverage, health insurance coverage such as Medicare and Medicaid. And so, we developed a program that allows people who are employed and have proof of employment, who have a permanent disability as determined by the social security administration to earn up to about \$55,000 a year gross income and still qualify for the state Medicaid program. And the state Medicaid program in New Jersey, and this is it true in many other parts of the country, is -- covers a lot of services and supports that people with disabilities particularly need.

In the last segment you heard John Fig talk about the need for personal care services. Well, Medicaid covers personal care services as one of its benefits in the workplace. And we also have things like prescription medication coverage, long-term psychological services, durable medical equipment, medical transportation. These are things that commercial insurance products usually do not cover, and they are things that are essential for people with disabilities.

So this program is an incentive for people to go to work because, while they may give up a benefit check that they have been receiving, they are replacing it with a paycheck, yet they

are maintaining that vital medical insurance coverage.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. And being active as well.

>> JOHN FIG: Yes. I might add also that we set the asset limit for that program at \$20,000 so that individuals with disabilities would be able to save up down payment on a home, purchase a car, buy clothes for work, you know, the expenses that everyone else has in relation to being employed and making their way in the world. So, we set that asset maximum at a high level so people wouldn't have to take their paycheck and completely spend it as soon as they got it in order to retain eligibility. And we have about 2,500 people receiving that coverage in New Jersey right now.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow. Now, for both Jan and Bill, for either of these programs, who is eligible? Does it encompass all disabilities? And how do people access the program?

>> BILL DITTO: I'm going to let Jan go first.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay.

>> JAN GOODMAN: I was actually going to say let Bill go first. But the one thing I did want to say about the one stop career center, um, one of the services that I neglected to mention is that we have individual training grants that come through workforce investment act dollars so that if someone came to us and wanted to go for training in a specific area, we are actually associated with a lot of training providers around the state and we can actually make that a reality for them.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And then you are open -- this program is open to anyone with a disability?

>> JAN GOODMAN: Um, yes, pretty much it is. A lot of this is also based upon, you know, referral systems, as I said, and the working model of the counselors within the one stop career center, social service agencies and mental health organizations.

>> BILL DITTO: I think, for the one stops, if I'm not mistaken, there, Jan, there is no requirement to, you know, necessarily have passed some sort of a disability test in order to get help.

>> JAN GOODMAN: No, there is no particular requirement.

>> BILL DITTO: Right. And it is a little different in the WorkAbility program because we do require that the individual meet the qualifications for social security disability, the clinical qualifications as an individual with a disability. That is one of our programmatic requirements. So, you need to have a disability that meets those requirements in order to come into the WorkAbility program. Whereas Jan's program is much more open.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And the WorkAbility program, is that still part of the federal grant?

>> BILL DITTO: No, this is a state operated program in New Jersey with federal support. Medicaid is a joint federal state program. So this is operated by the State of New Jersey as

part of its Medicaid, overall Medicaid program.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And, Jan, the Disability Program Navigator, is that a national initiative, or is that local as well?

>> JAN GOODMAN: It is a national initiative. As I mentioned, currently there is probably over 400 across the country. I just came from a meeting recently and we have approximately I believe it is 25 in the state of New Jersey and then we have three regional navigators as well with oversight for particular counties.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So is there one, um, internet web address that people could access to find out more about the program in their area?

>> JAN GOODMAN: Yes, we do. There is actually a program site for the DPN. I don't have that available right now, but it is something that I could get that information back to you.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. Well, I have been talking with Jan Goodman and Bill Ditto. Jan and Bill have covered many of the services available to people with disabilities to help them find and keep jobs. That was the earn portion of the show. We are talking about DiscoverAbility today and how it helps people with disabilities find work, make a good living, and thrive in their jobs.

We are going take a quick break and when we come back we will talk with Eileen Gallo who is a program development specialist at the Gloucester County Workforce Investment Board,

Department of Economic Development, and we are going to talk with her about employment of people with disabilities as part of a larger workforce strategy. So stay with us. I'm Donna Custard, and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities at Work Radio. Remember that Disabilities at Work can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Time on Voice America's Business Network.

We have been discussing DiscoverAbility and how it helps people with disabilities to work, earn and thrive. We have

covered the work and earn portions of the program, and now we are going to address the thrive portion.

I'm joined now about Eileen Gallo who works for the Gloucester County Workforce Investment Board, and she is here to speak to us about how her organization sees helping people with disabilities find and keep employment as a part of their larger workforce development plan. Welcome Eileen.

>> EILEEN GALLO: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to join you today.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Well, thanks for being with us. Can you tell us a little bit about how you became involved in the Workforce Investment Board?

>> EILEEN GALLO: How I became involved in the Workforce Investment Board? I was told to work here. (Laughter). No, it is -- my background was in human services. So, they had asked me to join and work with the Workforce Investment Board. Do you want me to describe the Workforce Investment Board?

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yes. Could you?

>> EILEEN GALLO: Yes. The Workforce Investment Board, at least on our level, is a partnership among business, government and community based organizations to promote continuous economic growth. That is typically our mission. But the board is comprised of 51 percent partnership, or private sector membership I should say. It creates policies to provide access to quality education, training, and support services, and we

assist the businesses to make those connect to productive employees. So that's how we got involved with people with disabilities, we want to connect them to the business world.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So, how is serving people with disabilities become more integral into your workforce strategy, because aren't workforce investment boards typically for people without disabilities?

>> EILEEN GALLO: No, that's not true. Because the word employment, a part of our mission is to create employment opportunities for a diverse population and part of our mission also too is to connect those -- it doesn't matter what kind of ability or disability you have. It is our mission to make sure that those people have jobs, and we taking that very seriously.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What do you think the government, employers and community based organizations should be doing to support the employment of people with disabilities?

>> EILEEN GALLO: Um, I think government should offer more programs similar to what this one program they have called Jobs Plus. This program, this is part of the ARRA, and what that does is reimburses private employers.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Can you explain what the ARRA is?

>> EILEEN GALLO: It is the American Reinvestment Recovery Act. And that was -- we used our money to, or the state did anyway, to hire people with not disabilities, but they were on welfare. And it is a 100 percent to 120 percent reimbursement. I think

it is more programs of that nature. Direct services to the employer to give, you know, so they have the money, not waiting for tax credits. That's just my opinion on it.

>> BILL DITTO: Well, I think that is an opinion, Eileen, that is shared by a lot of employers from folks that I have spoken to. You know, the tax credits are a nice thing, but the tax credits don't materialize for a while. And that immediate up front assistance, I think, makes a lot of difference.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What is the Gloucester County WIB been doing to support employment of people with disabilities?

>> EILEEN GALLO: Well, we have our little group, which I call the Disabilities Issues Group, and it is a subcommittee of the Workforce Investment Board, and what we do to keep this going is that we got, um, they call this - let me see, it is called the Act. This is derived or a brain child from this committee to create this act. What it does it help support people when they are leaving high school to, you know, either get jobs or to go on to college. And it is kind of a referral system without duplicating and it works with the Disability Navigator, it is another avenue for them to go through. Because this --

>> DONNA CUSTARD: In connection with the work Jan does.

>> EILEEN GALLO: Yes.

>> BILL DITTO: I think that also, Eileen, we would need to acknowledge that Eileen and the Gloucester County WIB has been one of the most forward thinking workforce investment boards in

the State of New Jersey. I met quite some time ago with their disabilities issues committee and I was just so impressed with the level of interest and commitment and enthusiasm that they had. And this act program that they have set up is actually now a pending piece of state legislation to create similar programs in other counties around New Jersey.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Do you have other examples of what makes them so forward thinking in Gloucester County?

>> BILL DITTO: I can't tell you, it must something in the water down there. (Laughter). No. I think they have a lot of committed individuals and I think they saw a very close connection with their community college and the community college was getting a lot of referrals of students with disabilities who weren't really quite ready for college level work, but really shouldn't be sitting at home. And they came up with this sort of unique way of creating an environment within the community college campus area that gives these students with disabilities some testing, some evaluation, some training, some support to sort of help them get on a career path. And it is a really, really nice model.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And where would people go to find out more about any WIB?

>> EILEEN GALLO: I would recommend you go to either the Department of Labor, your State Department of Labor or go to the Federal Department of Labor. The WIB was a mandate under

WIA, which is the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The Workforce Investment Act, the WIB, works as a policy making entity. So, we were given this WIA to work with, each county was, and then we were to develop a plan to go along with it. And that's how the WIBs came about.

>> BILL DITTO: And they are everywhere across the country. So as Ilene says, if you go to the U.S. Department of Labor, the United States Department of Labor website, you will find information about WIBs and you will be able to locate the WIBs in your particular area.

>> JAN GOODMAN: It is called -- it's [www.doleta.gov](http://www.doleta.gov).

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. And within every Department of Labor in every state, um, would they go to, say the state employment and training commission, to find out more about some of the programs we have discussed today or just about the WIBs ?

>> EILEEN GALLO: Um, I would say the DOL.

>> BILL DITTO: I think any State Department of Labor website would have a connection to the employment and training commission in the state, and then that sort of opens up the doors to, you know, a lot more information about the programs. I have looked at a number of websites of State Department of Labor across the country and they really have a lot of great information on them.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So, Eileen, I wanted to ask you, what would a typical day be like for you at the WIB?

>> EILEEN GALLO: A typical day? Mmmmm. It is actually reading a lot and then looking at what I'm reading and writing plans, surrounding people with disabilities or the chronically unemployed, people that are just unemployed and trying to figure out programs that would best fit those populations.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What you say are some of your more successful programs?

>> EILEEN GALLO: I would say the Adult Center for Transition Act.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: The Act Program.

>> EILEEN GALLO: Yes. Also we have a very good youth one stop career center, which is strictly for the youth. And I think our one stop is actually pretty good because what is nice about it is we have the Division of Vocational Rehab located, co-located at our one stop, which brings in people with disabilities. I guess just trying to even out the playing field and that is, I think that's our goal. It doesn't matter where you come from or what you do, we are here to serve you. That's what we do.

>> BILL DITTO: The other important element, I think, of the WIBs too that has made a big impression on me, is this 51 percent, you know, sort of business leadership component. So the Workforce Investment Board, which is setting policy actually, the policy is being controlled by the employer community to some extent, which I really think is great.

>> EILEEN GALLO: Yeah, because they tell us what's in demand, the demand occupation. So that is really - sure, we look at data and things like that, but when it comes down to the nitty-gritty, it's their local employers; it is the small businesses in our area that are actually going to employ people.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And that's key to make sure that you are giving the appropriate training to the people that you are trying to get jobs for.

>> EILEEN GALLO: Exactly.

>> BILL DITTO: Yeah. I think the other thing is too, that, you know, in the human service field, this is probably our weakest skill set. We are probably really best at doing human service type things. When it comes to understanding the whole business aspect of this, we are not the best folk. So, the more businesses in control of these things and involved in them directly, the better the outcomes.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And it is important to involve all of the stakeholders as well I would expect.

>> BILL DITTO: Yep.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: To make sure everyone is represented and you are giving the best possible outcome for your customers.

>> BILL DITTO: Yep.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Well, thank you so much. I'd like to thank all of our guests today, Bill, John, Jan, Eileen. You have really given us some really interesting information to mull

over.

I'd also like to thank this week's sponsors, the Kessler Foundation and the New Jersey Division of Disabilities Services. Thank you so much for your support.

Next Wednesday the noon Eastern Time we will be back with another show, exploring different ideas and innovations and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. Until then, I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities at Work Radio.

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