Editorial

David Mank, PhD has written a wonderful, forward looking, commentary entitled Alderbrook 2007, which the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* is pleased and proud to publish along with commentary from three key players in this process, Ruby Moore, Cesilee Coulson and Linda Rolfe. In an era where, more than ever, persons with disabilities, family members, advocates and policymakers are looking for beacons of success, especially in the area of employment, Washington state is leading the way. I can remember visiting my first Ellensburg conference, I think it was in 1983, hosted by Candace O'Neill and other progressives and feeling that there was a huge underlying movement going on... in fact, there was. The paradigm shift had begun. No longer would segregation be acceptable. No longer would day program slots be acceptable. No longer would rejection on the basis of disability be acceptable. Pioneers were born in those days and subsequent efforts at building meaningful implementation one individual at a time, one program at a time and one state at a time had begun.

It has not been easy. In fact, it's been very hard. This has become a continuing struggle to help persons with disabilities become sufficiently empowered so that they could gain access to their individual choices for real work for real pay. What has been perhaps the most discouraging is that we know more than ever about how to build workplace supports, how to customize jobs, how to develop new businesses, how to create business relationships and how to utilize work incentives from regulatory agencies. But still, it does not happen. Why? My overriding sense is that the problems are now log jammed into two major issues. The first is insufficient training, technical assistance and capacity. New programs and older programs alike do not know how to do real work for real pay in the large numbers that are necessary for systemic change. Hence, we lack the capacity to handle the many people who continue to be segregated and who are now waiting in line as they exit school programs where they have been in inclusion programs, collaborative classrooms and the like – there is genuine confusion on the part of families as to why they would go into segregated work environments like adult activity centers.

There is a second reason though and this gets at the heart of Alderbrook 2007. The policy and political will to change programs, to establish competitive employment first values is lacking. Most states simply have not made real work for real pay the first priority. There is not a true presumption of competitive employability. And where these values are so stated the funds have not been aligned with this mission. Understand it takes courage to change the inertia that is in place for decades and decades....but also understand these are peoples' lives!! These are people who often have learned helplessness, have not had an opportunity for informed choice and have not had the dignity of risk, the opportunity to fail and then grow. In short, we have let a generation go by without maximizing the human potential of persons with significant disabilities despite the plethora of laws and court decisions passed.

I urge you, the reader, to carefully read Alderbrook 2007. Dave Mank, who has given his heart and soul to this field for 30 years, has described the active fluid process that occurred with Alderbrook. Ruby and Cesillee comment beautifully on how this process unfolded and what it means to the state of Washington. I encourage all who read this to think to themselves: Could this happen in my state? What would be necessary for this to happen? Will we let another generation go by without giving them real work for real pay opportunities, informed choice to select what they want to do? We have made progress. But... it is not enough. We can and must do better.

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