



# focus

## Employing people with disabilities: *innovation, support, and civil rights*

When the American with Disabilities Act went into effect in 1992, working-age people with disabilities were hopeful that this individual rights law would eliminate employment discrimination. Ten years later, however, employment of people with disabilities had actually decreased. And now, in 2010, this group comprises only 19% of the workforce, compared to 65% of the workforce for people with no disabilities. That means fewer than one in five people with disabilities holds a job.

The situation for those individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities proves bleaker. In 2007, only 26% of people with intellectual disabilities who were paid or unpaid employees were working in an integrated employment setting. The others were supported in pre-vocational or day habilitation programs or non-work community services. So much for civil rights and non-discrimination.

The Arc, along with United Cerebral Palsy, has strongly advocated for better services and expanded opportunities for individuals with disabilities to work in the community through supported employment and other means. For youth, successful transitioning to adult life and employment means educators and service providers must work with students while they are still in school. For adults, service agencies need to provide individualized supports and programs that focus on job skills and employment and need to encourage employers to hire people with intellectual disabilities. Some believe the success of these efforts is, of course, tied directly to government funding and enforcement of ADA.

For its part, MCAR strives to provide employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in spite of the obstacles. The efforts of MCAR's Community Employment (CE) program focuses on the exploration of employment opportunities and work-skills training. Wanting to provide the best service possible, MCAR recently initiated a number of enhancements to its Community Employment program that will better prepare individuals for successful employment within the community.

Individuals with Community Employment funding receive interest and skills assessment, work training, job placement, and work-crew job opportunities at MCAR. Through supported employment activities, MCAR provides individualized services based on an individual's needs and interests, and assists in securing employment of choice. Training one-on-one with a job coach, an individual has his/her work interests and skills assessed; learns employment search techniques, such as job research, resume writing, interviewing, and work ethics; and is provided on-site job assistance and supervision once employed in the community. In

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