



MDRS

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT
OF
REHABILITATION SERVICES

2011 ANNUAL REPORT

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On behalf of the citizens with disabilities we serve, let me sincerely thank you for the support you have given the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS). We are making great strides in serving Mississippians with disabilities and you are certainly a part of every success story that we have. We are continually working to improve our services to consumers and develop partnerships with other agencies, consumer groups, and businesses.

At MDRS, we provide a quality program of comprehensive rehabilitation services, independent living services, and disability determination services for people with disabilities that will result in social and economic independence, employment opportunities, improved quality of life, and integration into the community. The Office of Special Disability Programs continues to increase home and community based services to our consumers with severe disabilities and without your help funding these services, many individuals would live in institutional settings instead of their own homes surrounded by their families and caregivers. The Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind have continued to meet or exceed all federal standards and indicators prescribed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and were rated as the #1 combined state rehabilitation program in America. The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS) continued to process a phenomenal number of cases with increased accuracy and with one of the best processing times in the country.

At MDRS, we are always working to serve Mississippians with disabilities in a timely and effective manner, mindful of our consumers' needs and concerns. Throughout our report, you will meet the many consumers and employers we have had the opportunity to serve and work with during 2011. I hope you enjoy reading about them and the accomplishments we have made together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H.S. 'Butch' McMillan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

H.S. "Butch" McMillan
Executive Director

MDRS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Disability Determination Services

We determine the medical eligibility of individuals with disabilities to receive benefits from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) directed by federal guidelines from the Social Security Administration.

Special Disability Programs

We assist individuals with more severe disabilities by providing supports which allow them to continue to live or move toward living independently in the home or community. *During 2011, the Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP) provided independent living services for 4,216 individuals with significant (severe) disabilities.*

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

We help over 20,000 Mississippians a year overcome limitations imposed by physical or mental disabilities in order for that person to secure or maintain employment. *In 2011, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) assisted 21,492 Mississippians with disabilities in receiving services including, but not limited to: counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, physical and mental restoration, job training, assistive technology, and job placement.* Individuals served by VR have a wide array of disabilities including: hearing loss or deafness, amputations, mental and emotional disorders, epilepsy, developmental disease and disorders, traumatic brain injuries, orthopedic impairments, residuals from cancer, and speech impairments to name a few. *The total number of successful employment outcomes for our VR consumers in 2011 was 4,559.*

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind

We specialize in working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired to ensure opportunities for inclusion into the workforce, community, and home. *In 2011, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (VRB) served 1,986 consumers who received services such as counseling and guidance in adjustment to disability, vocational exploration, orientation and mobility training, job training, and assistive technology. In 2011, Itinerant Teachers were provided for 94 consumers. In 2011, the Addie McBryde Center provided training to 152 consumers. REACH Center for the Blind provided training to 46 consumers.*

AbilityWorks, Inc. - AbilityWorks provides vocational assessments, job training, and actual work experience for VR consumers. *In 2011, AbilityWorks served 2,962 consumers resulting in 900 successful employment outcomes.* AbilityWorks has 17 community rehabilitation programs throughout the state.

Assistive Technology - We provide evaluations and assessments assuring that customers of MDRS have maximum access to technology available for individuals with disabilities.

Business Enterprise Program - We provide support for self-employment opportunities in the food service industry for Mississippians who are legally blind. *In 2011, thirty eight (38) individuals operated successful businesses as BEP vendors.*

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Community Rehabilitation Programs - We operate a network of 17 facilities, known as AbilityWorks, Inc., located throughout the state, to provide services such as vocational assessment, job training, and actual work experience for individual with disabilities.

Deaf Services - We help people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or late deafened find employment, attend education and training programs, and learn more about their community resources. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) possess required communication skills level on the Signed Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI), an American Sign Language assessment developed by the Rochester Institute of Technology. *This skill, along with other specialized training, has been a vital factor in the successful rehabilitation of 812 persons with deafness or significant hearing loss.* In addition, 5 staff interpreters are available to assist consumers and staff members and use American Sign Language to insure maximum accessibility throughout the rehabilitation process.

Independent Living Services for the Blind - We serve individuals who are legally blind and either over the age of 55 or have a significant secondary disability by providing a variety of independent living services. *In 2011, the Independent Living Program for the Blind provided services to 853 consumers.*

Selected Social Security Services - We help individuals with disabilities currently receiving Social Security Disability benefits explore employment opportunities without the fear of losing their benefits.

Supported Employment - We assist individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. The Supported Employment Program serves individuals with the most significant disabilities who require intensive support services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. Each MDRS district has a Supported Employment Team consisting of a specialized VR/SE counselor, and a Vocational Training Instructor who oversees the work of Job Trainers working on site with our consumers. *During 2011, 837 individuals received Supported Employment services, 116 resulting in successful employment.*

Transition Services - We work with eligible secondary school students with disabilities, their families, and school personnel to assure there is an integrated program of education and vocational training available to provide a seamless transition from school to work. *In 2011, the number of students receiving transition services was 3,262. Successful employment outcomes resulted for 468 students.* Examples of transition services are vocational-technical training, vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, on the job training, job search skills, and work experience programs. These services may be available to students both on and off campus or at one of the 17 AbilityWorks as a part of their school day.

Workforce Investment Act - We play a vital role in workforce development for our state to help ensure that Mississippians with disabilities are integrated into the workforce.

IN DEPTH LOOK AT VR/VRB IN 2011

PERSONS SERVED BY PRIMARY DISABILITY

PRIMARY DISABILITY	NUMBER SERVED
Cognitive and Mental	7,899
General Physical	5,776
Hearing Loss, Communicative	2,712
Orthopedic	2,673
Legally Blind, Other Visual	1,846
Deafness	312
Blindness	121
Respiratory	80
Application Status	54
Deaf-Blindness	17
No Impairment	2
Total	21,492

EMPLOYMENT IN INTEGRATED SETTINGS

OCCUPATION	NUMBER EMPLOYED
Executive/Managerial	134
Laborer	402
Operative	214
Professional	368
Sales	506
Secretarial/Office/Clerical	401
Service Worker	1,162
Skilled Craft	502
Technical/Paraprofessional	71
Total	3,760

EMPLOYMENT WORK STATUS OF PERSONS REHABILITATED

OCCUPATION	NUMBER REHABILITATED
Employment in Integrated Setting	3,760
Self-Employment (except BEP)	781
Homemaker	7
Vending Stand Operator	4
Unpaid Family Worker	7
Total	4,559

ANNUAL INCOME OF PERSONS REHABILITATED (BEFORE AND AFTER SERVICES)

Time of Application	\$ 16,442.40
Time of Closure	\$ 19,430.40

IN DEPTH LOOK AT VR/VRB IN 2011

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PERSONS SERVED

GENDER	PERCENTAGE
Male	42.27
Female	57.73

AGE AT APPLICATION	PERCENTAGE
10 and under	0.03
10 - 20	8.75
20 - 30	26.03
30 - 40	16.11
40 - 50	18.98
50 - 60	18.01
60 - 70	9.20
70 - 80	2.27
80 - 90	0.59
90 - 100	0.03
Average Age at Application	29.15

EDUCATION LEVEL AT APPLICATION	PERCENTAGE
No Formal Schooling	0.18
Elementary Education (Grades 1-8)	3.91
Secondary Education, no high school diploma	15.28
High School Graduate or Equivalency Certificate	13.85
Post-Secondary Education, no degree	2.49
AA degree or Vocational Technology Certificate	0.71
Bachelor's degree	0.71
Master's degree or higher	0.18
Special Education (completion or attendance)	62.70

RACE	PERCENTAGE
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.55
Asian	0.37
Black or African American	45.25
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.15
Hispanic or Latino	0.75
White or Caucasian	52.93

AVERAGE COST OF SERVICES PER CLIENT

\$5,568.05

TAXES PAID AFTER SUCCESSFUL REHABILITATION

The average taxes paid by an individual in the first year of employment after a successful closure are \$766.40.
 The total taxes paid in the first year of employment for all clients in Fiscal Year 2011 were \$3,494,024.35.

IN DEPTH LOOK AT 2011

OFFICE OF DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES

Claims Processed	107,972
Average Processing Time	97 Days
Average Cost per Case	\$299.00
Accuracy Rate	98%

OFFICE OF SPECIAL DISABILITY PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

PROGRAM	NUMBER SERVED
Independent Living Waiver	2,530
TBI/SCI Trust Fund	43
TBI/SCI Waiver	807

SELECTED SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES

TICKETS

Issued to Mississippi	188,043
In Use with Vocational Rehabilitation	1,044
Assigned to MDRS as Employment Network	211

M-PIC

Total number served through September 2009	8,531
Community Work Incentive Coordinators	4
(Tupelo WIN Center, Pearl WIN Center, Greenwood MDRS Office, Gulfport MDRS Office)	

RICHARD SOREY

On November 1, 2011, MDRS welcomed a new Director of VRB, Richard Sorey, referred to as “Rich” by his friends. He was born in Chesapeake, VA, the first of two sons born to Rita and Lee Sorey. By the time Rich was two years old, the doctors at John Hopkins told his parents that he had Optic Atrophy and there was absolutely nothing that could be done to prevent total blindness. His parents were devastated but always very supportive. They were determined to do everything within their power to help him get a good education and develop to his full potential, despite his congenital blindness.

Rich’s parents requested a transfer to Staunton, VA in order to enroll Rich in the state school for the Blind. The Rehab Act of 1973 allowed people with disabilities to mainstream through the public school system, so when Rich began the eighth grade, he attended public school. Rich completed assignments primarily with the use of tape recorders and readers, since instructors couldn’t read Braille. After graduating, Rich attended James Madison University, where he majored in Communication Arts and History. At that time he wanted to get a Master’s Degree in Broadcast Management and be a radio personality; however, life changed that plan because several graduate programs denied him admission even though he met their criteria. He laughingly said he was unemployed for a year, during which time he recorded the number of interviews he had – one hundred and one, no less. He continued to be turned down for the jobs due to his blindness. Employers were afraid of liability and accommodation issues. Transportation was the major issue, followed by a lack of up-to-date technology and the misconceptions about persons with disabilities.

Eventually Rich began work as a headhunter and notes that this seemed to be the only job available to him at the time. He was gifted at helping others find jobs because he was a good communicator and very knowledgeable. While working fulltime, he enrolled at Old Dominion University and obtained his Masters Degree in counseling with a concentration in school guidance. Shortly after graduation, Rich was offered a job as a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor with the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Again, his duties included helping people find jobs. After working as a VR counselor for 4.5 years, Rich obtained his CRC designation and was promoted to Regional Manager. Rich managed offices in rural and urban locations for 11 years before he was promoted to the BEP Director position in Richmond last summer. He had always wanted to be a Director of Services for the Blind, so Rich decided to advance his career and accept the position he now holds with MDRS.

Rich met his wife during college. They were married for 27 years and have three children--Luke, Matthew, and Jenna. Rich says he enjoys sports of all kinds and loves to fish and hunt with his sons. His children are very important to him, and he stays involved in their lives. When they were young, Rich said he would tie bells to their shoes to keep up with them. As they grew older, that task became a little harder. Rich is thankful for life’s blessings and declares that fatherhood has proven to be one of life’s greatest bonuses to him.

The secret of Rich’s success is his determination. His approach to each undertaking is “Go at it as hard as you can. You will have failures, but the bottom line is how you handle your failures and bounce back. There is always tomorrow, so regroup and do something different. What did you learn from your failure, and what changes can you make so you don’t fail again?” He says that the best way to help blind and visually impaired consumers is to establish effective partnerships where consumers and rehab agencies collaborate to achieve success. Rich’s goal is to do as much as he can to help people with disabilities have a better quality of life. This remarkable man knows from experience how to overcome obstacles and succeed in life. With his history of accomplishing goals, there is no doubt that he will accomplish this one, as well.



Cameron Stubbs

CAMERON STUBBS

Cameron Stubbs, currently serving as Disability Outreach Coordinator, entered into the world of rehabilitation when he was a senior at Ole Miss at age 22. He, along with some friends, spent their Spring Break in Nassau, Bahamas. His first day there ended in disaster, however, when he dove into a hotel swimming pool and sustained a neck injury. Finding him floating in the pool, a friend---a former lifeguard, pulled him from the water and began CPR. Suddenly an EMT appeared and together they were successful in getting Cameron breathing again. He didn't wake up for 3 days; this time he was back in the States---at the Ryder Trauma Center in the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. With tubes down his throat, unable to speak, he used an alphabet chart to spell out what he needed to his parents, as well as vent his frustration and concerns. His dad made a statement during that time that has remained with Cameron and helped him through his difficult times, "Son, it is the trials we go through in life that teach us what kind of men we become." Cameron stressed that throughout his ordeal, he was surrounded by an aura of comfort and protection that could only come from God. As a result, he never got angry over his circumstances. God was with him helping him to understand his purpose and how his accident could be used to help the lives of others in similar situations.

Cameron returned to Mississippi to the Methodist Rehab Center in Jackson, where he felt a new awakening, with a new goal to accomplish daily---from learning to eat, shave, brush his teeth, get out of bed, and other activities of daily living. Progress was slow, but at least it was progress. He refused to become a statistic or a burden. Cameron chose to treat each challenge as a job to do in order to accomplish his goals. He gives much credit to his VR counselor, Lou Ellen Caden, who gave him confidence with her guidance and encouragement to achieve his goals. After seven weeks of therapy, Cameron was discharged and returned home to Pickens with his family. Cameron had grown very independent, and his desire to remain that way fueled his passion to regain enough strength and mobility to function on his own. Lou Ellen, his VR Counselor, crafted a plan to hit the gym intensely a few days a week and then take online classes during his down time. His strength increased so much that he could manipulate his body without the help of others and maneuver his wheelchair like a pro.

With help from VR, Cameron enrolled in Ole Miss, connected with student disability services, and obtained an apartment. A year later, he was a college graduate, a feat that had seemed impossible in that Miami hospital years before. Cameron states, "With all the problems and breakdowns that go with being paralyzed, MDRS made it so nice not to have to worry about how, who, and what was going to help me get where I needed to be. That's the beauty of the rehabilitation wheel of life. It takes the pressure of some of the most important things off of us, at least for a little while, while we wrangle with the multiple issues that come with having a disability."

From graduation, Cameron moved forward with additional help from VR. Although he had originally planned to be a pharmaceutical salesman, the sales field no longer worked for him because of his body limitations and accessibility issues. Another issue came to the forefront, too---discrimination due to his disability. But he realized he possessed the strengths he needed, a sharp mind and a love of God and people. With that realization, Cameron says his purpose hit him like a punch in the stomach. God had led him back to Mississippi to spread the word that nothing is impossible and demonstrate that fact to others. He chose to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, who once served as VR Director for MDRS in North MS and was a strong advocate for individuals with disabilities. Cameron, MDRS Disability Outreach Coordinator, is quick to say, "Life is filled with endless possibilities and, with the right help---like I received from Vocational Rehabilitation---each of us can make a difference in the world around us and in the lives of others."



Ben Wagenknecht

BEN WAGENKNECHT

Ben Wagenknecht was born in Colombia, South America; and, at the age of 3, he was adopted by a wonderful couple from Massachusetts. His adoptive parents told him that, at the time he was adopted, he was already deaf; but they didn't know if he was born that way. Ben was one of eight children; and, because of financial hardship, the younger children were put up for adoption. He is very thankful that he was still adopted after his parents were told of his deafness. Right away, his parents learned sign language, but then discovered Ben did not know any at all. Communication was very difficult, but his mother made every effort to help him learn basic sign language and remained attentive always to what Ben was trying to say. Even their biological son learned to communicate by sign language with Ben, so the new family worked out well.

Ben had a well-rounded education, first attending The Learning Center for the Deaf High School in Massachusetts, where he graduated in 1992. He then attended Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., graduating in 1998 with a BA in Social Work. He completed his college education at the University of North Texas, where he finished Graduate school with Cum Laude Honors in 2008 with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation. After graduation, he worked as a direct care counselor for four years at the Family Services Foundation in Maryland. There he met the girl of his dreams from Coldwater, MS, who changed his life. They married and moved to Mississippi to be near her family, and she encouraged him to apply for a job with MDRS. Ben did so and met a guy who had a major influence on him---Rell Webber, former VR State Coordinator for the Deaf, who helped Ben in his efforts to become a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf. Ben began with MDRS in Starkville, where he worked for about two years, and then transferred to Olive Branch. After six months there, he was promoted to Director of ODHH on Feb. 1, 2008.

As Director of ODHH, Ben says, "I was handed a rich opportunity to touch on many different real-world issues. It has helped me to grow and attain more wisdom, as well as become more creative and organized. MDRS gives me the freedom to associate with workers in Deaf programs in other states, which I think is very important, as we all are trying to improve and increase our outreach across the country. My office's main focuses are on Public Awareness, Community Outreach, Communication Service and Advocacy. This office was expertly created by MDRS to reach the deaf population throughout Mississippi. It is not always glamour and glitz, but this experience and opportunity have absolutely gone beyond my expectations. There are not many places that offer the quality of learning that MDRS offers. As we learn, we provide almost perfect services for people with disabilities. I could never replace this enrichment experience in a lifetime."

When asked what his biggest challenge has been, he sums it up in one word---Communication! If asked what has helped him the most in his job, he'll say "a good attitude." If you want to know what brings him the most joy, just ask him about his two-year-old son Bailey!



Barbara Hadnott

BARBARA HADNOTT

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, Barbara was one of eight children---three of whom were born blind, and all three have been through the MDRS Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind Program. All are success stories, as well, with one sister serving as Minister of Music at a local church, one sister has served as a Social Worker and worked at a call center, and Barbara serving as the Computer Instructor at Addie McBryde.

Barbara remembers that all she needed to accomplish a goal is for someone to tell her she couldn't do it! That determination has served her well throughout her life, helping her to achieve the honor of Valedictorian at graduation from the Mississippi School for the Blind in Jackson, a 3.35 GPA at graduation from Jackson State University in 1975 with a B.S. Degree in Mass Communications, and a 3.75 GPA in 1979 when she completed 30 hours towards her M.A. degree in Mass Communications from JSU. Barbara also attended the Hadley School for the Blind in Winnetka, Illinois. She currently serves on the MIB Board of Directors, the MSB Stakeholders Advisory Council, the Braille Bill Advisory Council, and the Jackson-Hinds Library Systems Administrative Board. Barbara is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and the National Federation of the Blind, serving as 1st VP of the NFB of Mississippi.

In August 2009, in working with the National Federation of the Blind to promote Braille literacy, Barbara submitted a letter on this subject to President Obama, which was one of 100 letters selected for inclusion in a booklet for the Secretary of Education to present to President Obama. Barbara states, "I had a head start on the letter because I had just won second place in the Adult Division of an essay contest sponsored by the American Printing House for the Blind. I used that essay to develop my letter."

Barbara began her employment career at Mississippi Industries for the Blind, which financed her way through graduate school. This is relevant because now she is on the Board of MIB. In the 1980s, she worked for Disability Determination Services, which is where she met Rosie Gibson, an examiner. Now both are employed at Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center, with Rosie serving as Director of the Center and Supervisor of Client Services, demonstrating a successful history of training and employment for both at MDRS. Barbara worked at the Advocacy Center for the Elderly and Disabled in Shreveport, LA from 1992 to 1996 and then for Goodwill Industries in Jackson, MS from 1997 to December 2000, when she came to Addie McBryde. Barbara is currently in the LEADRS Class at MDRS, which she says has helped her get in touch with her inner self, learn how to improve her skills, develop friendships with coworkers in the agency, and gain confidence in her abilities.

Her training has made Barbara an excellent public speaker and facilitator at workshops on topics such as Women's Issues, Advocacy, Assistive Technology, Braille, Promoting Orientation and Mobility, Dealing with Stress, and Spirituality. She has planned and organized events, such as Walks for Independence, Braille Summit, State Conventions, Mississippi School for the Blind Alumni Reunions, Leadership Seminars, and Evangelistic Walkathons.



Alison Smitherman

ALISON SMITHERMAN

Alison Smitherman grew up in Jackson with her three sisters. Born totally blind, at the age of 1 year she had surgery for congenital cataracts, which enabled her to have partial vision. Her sister Melanie was also born totally blind with congenital cataracts and had the same surgery as Alison. Both are still categorized as legally blind; however, with the help of the Agency's VRB Program, they are successfully rehabilitated, living independently and productively. At 17, Alison was assisted by MDRS in acquiring contact lens to replace the glasses the Agency had previously provided her. In 1997, it became necessary for Alison to have several glaucoma surgeries, and a tube shunt was put in place to control the pressure in her eyes. To help with her visual needs, MDRS provided surgical glasses and various assistive technology devices to help with her secretarial duties.

In 1978, with financial aid provided by MDRS, she graduated from Hinds Community College with a degree in Secretarial Science. After a couple of other training jobs, she was ready for a full-time job. In 1980, Alison went to work with the MS Dept. of Mental Health, where she worked for 17 years. In 1997, Alison was hired as Administrative Assistant to the MDRS Director of OVRB, where she stayed for 14 years, retiring this year. Alison says "MDRS, through the OVRB Program, is really making a difference in the lives of people with visual impairments. There are so many needs of a blind or visually impaired person, that there is no way, unless your family is very wealthy, that you can afford all the glasses, contacts, medical expenses, education, training, and assistive technology equipment that is necessary to live independently in your home and community. I am so grateful that OVRB provided these services to me, as well as to my sister Melanie and my husband Mike. I have seen lives changed because of OVRB, and I am so thankful to have played a role in helping others while employed at MDRS. When Mike and I married 29 years ago, we were both legally blind and had a huge transportation issue--the #1 issue for the blind. Thanks to OVRB, Mike was fitted with a \$4,000 pair of glasses with bioptic lens, enabling him to drive. With these special glasses, he could spot signs, red lights, and other objects he could not see previously. On a very special Sunday in 2002, Mike was able to drive us to church for the first time. It was a time of celebration, and we owed it all to OVRB!"

DRV NW - TXT L8R

In an effort to enable Mississippians with spinal cord injury and traumatic brain injury achieve their maximum level of independence, the 1996 Mississippi Legislature established the Traumatic Brain Injury/Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury (TBI/SCI) Trust Fund. The goal of the Trust Fund Program is to assist individuals who are severely disabled by traumatic spinal cord injury or traumatic brain injury to resume activities of daily living and to reintegrate into the community with as much dignity and independence as possible.

Any resident of Mississippi, regardless of age, who has a severe disability as a result of a traumatic spinal cord injury or a traumatic brain injury and is medically stable, shall be eligible for services. The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) was designated by the Legislature to administer the Spinal Cord and Brain Injury Trust Fund Program.

The MDRS Office of Special Disability Programs coordinates the direct services to eligible consumers, and a full-time program coordinator oversees the coordination of services. A variety of community-related integration programs are also provided through the Traumatic Brain Injury/Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund via contracts with community organizations and agencies.

A ten-member advisory Council provides advice and expertise to the MDRS in the preparation, implementation and periodic review of the TBI/SCI Trust Fund Program.

JASON HADLEY

Jason Hadley of Bogue Chitto came to MDRS for assistance in July 2006. Jason has Asperger Syndrome, one of the autism spectrum disorders that affect how the brain processes information. The Syndrome causes difficulty in communication, building relationships, and with social interaction.

With counseling from Sherry Hughes-Brown, Supported Employment Counselor in McComb, and guidance from Cindy Collinsworth, the Vocational Training Instructor in Brookhaven, Jason was better able to understand his limitations, as well as his capabilities; and, in so doing, learned how to function successfully in a business environment.

A Customized Employment plan was then utilized to place Jason in a position with the Lincoln County Chancery Clerk's Office on May 17, 2011. His primary job is to file and organize books in the Records Room; however, he is doing such an outstanding job there, that he has also been assigned to other offices in the Courthouse to file and organize, as well. His case was successfully closed on September 28, 2011.

Sherry Hughes-Brown recalls, "Jason has a passion for reading, and he especially enjoys collecting books about famous people. Because of this, as well as his punctuality and skills in organization, he is perfect for this job and enjoys it very much."

Cindy Collinsworth states, "Jason is a perfect example that Customized Employment works!"

DURRELL McCOY

Durrell McCoy, a 31-year old resident of Hattiesburg, was born deaf and communicates through the American Sign Language (ASL). Durrell suffered from low self-esteem and had isolation issues, which were detrimental to him in obtaining or keeping a job. At AbilityWorks in Hattiesburg, he underwent the LINCS Job Readiness Training, which included learning multistep tasking, following instructions, accepting constructive criticism, and developing interpersonal interactions with co-workers. He received interpreter services for his classes and learned how to properly interview for a job and then retain that job. Durrell has been facing challenges and adversity all of his life, but they have not kept him from his goal of gaining independence through employment. Job placement assistance through MDRS truly helped Durrell attain his independence both vocationally and personally. He was without transportation when he first began his job and had to walk to and from work; however, with his earnings, Durrell took care of that problem by purchasing a truck. He has achieved great respect around the office at the William Colmer Federal Building in Hattiesburg because of his work ethics and “get it done” attitude. His co-workers call him “The Big Guy”, and Durrell loves the rapport he has developed with them. With the help of MDRS, Durrell learned that life---and people---can be good.

Durrell McCoy



COOPERATIVE DISABILITY INVESTIGATIONS

The Office of Disability Determination Services (DDS) is 100% federally funded through the Social Security Administration (SSA) and establishes eligibility for Mississippians with disabilities that apply for Supplemental Security Income and/or Social Security Disability Insurance. Applicants file for disability benefits in Social Security field offices throughout the state and these claims are forwarded to our office where criteria set forth by SSA is used in developing the claim and making the disability decision.

When a claim reaches DDS, it is assigned to a Disability Examiner. An examiner is responsible for developing the claim and recommending a disability decision, based on SSA criteria. In order to carry out this process, the examiner develops the medical and vocational evidence required to evaluate the extent of the applicant's limitations. Contacts by mail and/or telephone are made with the claimant and treating sources to secure pertinent information. If the available medical information is incomplete, the examiner may request a consultative examination (CE), at no cost to the applicant.

The Mississippi DDS has a Medical Unit staffed with medical and psychological consultants who provide expert medical knowledge about the functional limitations imposed by the impairments present. When all medical and vocational development is complete, the examiner recommends a decision regarding disability. When all case processing actions are completed, cases may be randomly selected for internal quality review within the department (QA) and/or for review by the Disability Quality Branch (DQB), in SSA's Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia.

The CDI program, begun in 1998, is a joint effort among federal and state law enforcement agencies to prevent fraud in the Social Security Administration's Title II and Title XVI disability programs and related federal/state programs. As of FY 2012, there are 25 CDI units in operation, covering 23 states.

The newest CDI Unit officially opened in Jackson, MS in October 2011. The Mississippi CDI Unit began investigating their first claims in November. This unit is a collaborative effort among OIG Special Agent Becki Hart, two SSA Management Support Specialists – LaTrenda Citizen-Harris and Jorge Reyes, and DDS Analyst Reeca Mincy to combat fraud in our disability programs. The objective of the CDI program is to investigate suspicious disability claims and allegations of malingering; seek criminal and/or civil prosecution of applicants and beneficiaries and refer cases for consideration of Civil Monetary Penalties and administrative sanctions when appropriate; identify, investigate, and seek prosecution of third party facilities (doctors, lawyers, interpreters) who facilitate and promote disability fraud. There are four basic types of disability fraud: concealing work activity, concealing changes in status, exaggerated or non-existent disabilities, and unreported Worker's Compensation benefits.

CDI is one of the most successful anti-fraud initiatives SSA have in place, saving the agency millions of program dollars. Data indicates that, as of July 2011, the fiscal year-to-date savings to SSA is \$225,157,526. The CDI program helps ensure benefits are paid only to those who are rightfully entitled.

ELLIOTT STREET

Elliott Street is a 64 yr. old male playwright, actor, director, and screenwriter. He has been involved with theater since the young age of 11. He acquired his skills naturally, as both parents were charter members of the Meridian Little Theatre. He also has a 14 yr. old son. Elliott has a visual impairment due to endothelial guttata of corneas with secondary edema and pseudophakia. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) referred him to assistive technology, where he was evaluated for Adaptive Computer Access and Jobsite Accommodation. He was also referred by OVRB to the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind for low vision evaluation and aids. Elliott then returned to Meridian to work with the restoration of Meridian's Grand Opera House and to teach Theatre Arts and Oral Communication at Meridian Community College.

In 2003, due to copyright infringements, Mr. Street was unable to get material enlarged enough to enable him to see to perform a play. OVRB provided Mr. Street with his first viewer to enable him to read on the computer screen and continue working, which he did for the next few years until he reached another obstacle. In 2006, Elliott needed a computer to participate in a workshop. His employer, Meridian Community College, provided him with the computer, but he still needed a projector in order to adequately view the material for lesson planning. Again, OVRB came to his aid, purchasing the necessary equipment for him to retain employment.

During his tenure as a teacher, he developed a hearing loss resulting in OVRB's purchase of hearing aids to keep him alert and sharp in his performance as a teacher and actor. By providing the low visual aids, hearing aids, and adaptive equipment, OVRB has enabled him to continue working over the years. Elliott not only serves as a teacher, but also as a highly recognized actor. Through the efforts and services of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Elliott Street and his passion for the fine art of theatre continue to be in the spotlight.



Elliott Street

BILL JAEHN

This story is a demonstration of how dedicated the MDRS staff is toward helping Mississippians with disabilities. In this particular incident, Brandy Procell, Counselor for Pearl River County, was on her first date with a seemingly nice guy at a swanky little Italian restaurant in Picayune. Brandy was unable to concentrate on her date's conversation or her meal due to watching a nearby couple's struggle to enjoy their meals. The man was in a power chair and suffered from partial paralysis. His wife was assisting him with his meal, as she tried to eat her own, and they were attempting to conduct a conversation. It was sweet, yet sad, to watch them trying to savor their dining experience under the circumstances.

Brandy sat at her table determining how to assist them. Once the couple finished their meal, she followed them outside to their car, where she introduced herself and presented her business card. After explaining the services MDRS had to offer, Brandy was touched to see tears flowing down the lady's face. She learned the couple was Mr. and Mrs. Bill Jaehn, and Mrs. Jaehn was in agony over placing her husband in a nursing home the previous month after realizing she could no longer adequately care for him. She had to work in order to pay their bills and saw no other solution. It was breaking her heart to do so, and she confessed how badly she wanted to be able to keep him at home.

As a result of Brandy's assistance, Bill Jaehn was transitioned from the nursing home back to his own home. He is now an Independent Living Waiver client, with two Personal Care Attendants providing for his personal care needs while his wife is at work. Our OSDP office modified his bathroom with a roll-in shower, so he can bathe safely with the use of a shower chair. His vehicle was modified to transport his power chair, and a ramp was built to enable him to mobilize in and out of the house in a safe manner. Brandy was able, through the provisions of this agency, to make a major difference in the lives of this couple. Brandy states, "On my visits, Mrs. Jaehn asks me where I hide my wings, and I am reminded why we do what we do. It is a true joy to see the transformation that takes place in the lives of people with disabilities when our agency gets involved."

LASHONDA OATIS

Lashonda Oatis, a May 2011 graduate of the REACH Center, is a blind resident of Tupelo. She lives with her 5 year-old daughter Genesis and is the responsible party for her mother, a retired teacher who lives nearby in an Assisted Living Center. Lashonda learned a lot from her mother and remembers that, as a child, they would take headlines from the Memphis newspaper and use them to play word games. All their activities involved educational games or functions, and Lashonda uses those same learning tools with her daughter today. They especially enjoy a series of books that have the printed words next to the Braille. The Beginner's Braille Bible is her favorite. Lashonda is very talented--loves to sing in her church choir and is a great motivational speaker.

Before Lashonda graduated from REACH, she had started her own Internet business, the Blind Faith Bistro, selling specialty coffees. She has a winning personality, is extremely positive in her outlook, and believes it is very important to go the extra mile in all situations. Carol Conyers, Director of the REACH Center, states, "Lashonda is an exceptional person. Her blindness is just one of her characteristics; it does not define who she is. Her goal is to move into Administration while working with disabled citizens, particularly the blind. But, she makes it very clear that she never wants to move so high in an organization that she loses contact with the consumers. That ability to be of service to others is the fabric of her life."

LORI GILLIS

Lori Gillis grew up in Starkville, MS where she is active in her church and enjoys family activities. She has two older sisters, who have moved from the home, leaving Lori in the care of her parents. Although they are supportive, the family is also very protective of Lori, since she is legally blind, with a degenerative nerve disease. For 11 years, Lori attended the MS School for the Blind, beginning in the 2nd grade. She was 4 credits short for a high school diploma, so she obtained a special certificate of completion. Utilizing the AT equipment MDRS purchased for her, Lori hopes to obtain her GED.

She became an MDRS client in 2009; and, although her parents were hesitant for her to work, Lori insisted on obtaining a part-time job. She participated in the AbilityWorks program and in August 2010 began work at Aramark, MSU's food service company. With the assistance of a Supported Employment job coach, Lori was trained to be a lobby hostess. Because of her good attitude, people skills and work ethic, she was recently given a 2% raise. Her Vocational Evaluator, Marie Portera was instrumental in encouraging Lori to achieve her goal of employment. Marie says, "Lori is a very tender-hearted, compassionate person, with an awesome faith in God. She has a significant speech impediment, making it difficult to understand her at times, so Lori is often asked to repeat herself. Instead of getting irritated, she responds in a very calm, patient manner. She is an amazing woman."

One of Lori's talents is photography. Because of her limited vision, Lori takes photos of people so she can get a clearer image of them. These photos are kept in a special album to help her remember people important to her. Lori says, "I want to be an inspiration to other people with disabilities, to encourage them to keep the faith." She firmly believes God put her here for a reason.



Lori Gillis

HAYLEY LADNIER

Hayley Ladnier of Ocean Springs has written her own personal testimony of her rehabilitation, as follows: “I am a recovering drug addict. My sobriety date is June 29, 2009. My journey to recovery started many years ago at the age of 13 when I started smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. I was a kid with dreams of becoming a ballet dancer in New York City, but I had no idea that my addiction would rob me of everything good in my life, and my dreams would vanish.

As I entered high school, I desired to be popular, and therefore I did things to fit in that I never thought I would do. At 14, I was arrested for driving with no license, driving under the influence, and running a stop sign in the attempt to hit a police car. That was only the beginning of many more arrests. My addiction progressed rapidly; by the age of 16 I was a daily cocaine user. I surrounded myself with people that were just like me: thieves, liars, master manipulators. My senior year of high school, I gave up on my dream of becoming a ballet dancer when I walked off the stage of the annual Christmas show, and I never looked back. The craving for drugs was so powerful inside me that it became my one and only driving force.

After high school, I attended the community college about 10 minutes from my house, eventually becoming a dropout. At this time, I became involved with a man much older than myself, who sold drugs, and left my parents’ house to live with him. He introduced me to the drug oxycotin. Wow, was it powerful! This drug allowed me to have no contact with my friends or my family, and I quit my job. I only existed, with no purpose. At 19, I found myself behind bars with plenty of time on my hands to think about the destruction I had caused. I honestly wanted a different way of life, but I wasn’t willing to let go of people, places, and things.

Finally, at 21, I was beat. It was no longer fun; I was terrified of life and had no coping skills. The only thing I knew was hustling people for money to get drugs, so I could face the day ahead. One summer night, I found myself leaving the bar, going home to sit in my room alone and get high. I had a moment of clarity when I looked in the mirror at my reflection. I was absolutely disgusted at the person staring back! I didn’t know how it had gone that far. Within a matter of seconds, I found myself on my knees begging God to help me, and He did. Two weeks later, I began treatment at Recovery House in Columbus.

There I learned the coping skills I needed for daily living---how to be a friend, but most of all, how to be a daughter to such loving parents. Through group therapy, daily living classes, and counseling sessions, I was able to get rid of all the garbage I had

been carrying around for so long. I was able to accept the person that I was and forgive myself and others. About 30 days into treatment, I met Laura, my VR Counselor. By then, I had the willingness to let go of people, places, and things. I wanted a new way of life, and I wanted my Counselor to see that. When I met Laura, I realized how much she really cared about my situation and knew I had to follow the rules. I did, and she was able to get VR to fund the rest of my treatment. For that, I will forever be thankful; because, without that funding, I don't know where I'd have ended up.

I finished the secondary treatment at Recovery House and went on to live in transitional housing, where I was able to put my coping skills to practice. I was hired as a Sales Associate at CATO, where I showed up on time, didn't call in sick, and was the best worker I could be. Today, I am a young adult filled with life once again. I have mended the relationships with my family and friends. Thanks....to all who helped!"



WILLIAM BEASLEY

Will Beasley was 20 years old when he had his accident in April 2001. The shallow diving accident paralyzed Will as a c5 quadriplegic. Vocational Rehabilitation allowed Will to focus on his personal goals and accomplishments without adding the extra stress of accumulating financial sources to help him continue his education.

Being a quadriplegic is hard enough with its multiple limitations, but life can be even more difficult with the added stress of mobility and accessibility. Will stated that the assistive technology provided by VR allowed him to become mobile and reduced the stress and worry from his life about transportation. As he became mobile and worked through therapy, he regained his strength and self-confidence and returned to the University of Mississippi to finish his bachelor's degree.

VR helped Will acquire his tuition and books to finish his bachelor's degree, and also helped him network with other support organizations to assist him in Law School. Will graduated from Ole Miss Law School in 2008, and is now an attorney in Tupelo with Phelps Dunbar Law Firm.

Will stated that having VR support his return to school and adapt his van with assistive technology helped him gain confidence and pride in his life. He now lives as independently as possible and works full time. Vocational Rehabilitation set the wheels in motion to propel Will into a successful career and rewarding life.

RICHARD MOOREHEAD

Heather Ladner, with the Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP) in Gautier, first met with Mr. Moorehead in 2005. As soon as counselor met with client she knew he was a determined individual. Mr. Richard Moorehead is a 25 year old man from Pascagoula. Mr. Moorehead has a traumatic brain injury due to an ATV accident on November 19, 2004.

Mr. Moorehead has made many strides and accomplishments' since his accident in 2004. Mr. Moorehead has received bathroom modifications to allow him to maintain his personal safety and hygiene. Also, Richard has just received a Continuous Passive Motion unit (CPM). Continuous Passive Motion is a postoperative treatment method that is designed to aid in his recovery. Applied postoperatively, this device may be used on an inpatient or an outpatient basis. By using a motorized device to very gradually move the joint, it is possible to significantly accelerate recovery time by decreasing soft tissue stiffness, increasing range of motion, promoting healing of joint surfaces and soft tissue, and preventing the development of motion-limiting adhesions (scar tissue). Interestingly, this is accomplished without patient effort (passively) as the machine moves a joint through a defined (prescribed) range of motion for an extended period of time. MDRS has also purchased client DME including a new fully electronic hospital bed and a standing frame.

Mr. Moorehead's determination and strong family support as well as the assistance given by MDRS and counselor Heather Ladner. Mr. Moorehead is regaining his independence in his home and community.

JERRY ASKEW

Jerry Askew, a Columbus lawyer, lost his vision in 1984 as a result of diabetic retinopathy; however, instead of giving up and quitting his law practice, he chose to seek assistance and make the most of his life and abilities. Although it was difficult to leave his family for several months, he chose to undergo training at a personal adjustment training center for blind veterans in Birmingham. Jerry realized that if he did not have the proper training, he would have to be dependent on his wife and others, and he refused to allow that to happen. He later became a client of OVRB, where he was given assistance with his medical bills, assistive technology equipment, etc.

As a result of his strong determination and training, he was able to return to the courtroom, where he has been a huge success. Shanna Ferrell, his OVRB Counselor, states, “Mr. Askew was always grateful for the Agency’s assistance and was kind and patient with me as his Counselor when I was new on the job. He was a pleasure to work with, and I am very pleased to have had the chance to work with him. He continues to be an inspiration to me and many others, because of his great faith, which he demonstrates daily.”



Jerry Askew

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