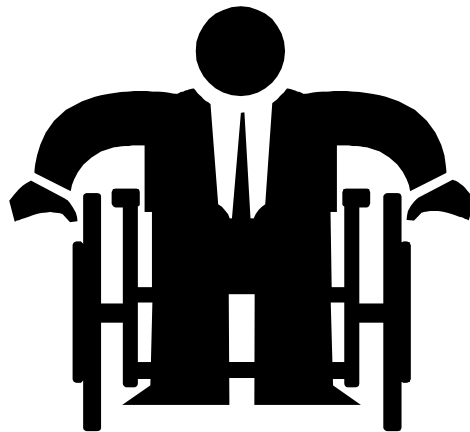


BARRIERS AND BRIDGES

A case study of eleven individuals with spinal cord injury, and their quest for employment.



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**REHABILITATION RESEARCH CENTER
FOR TBI AND SCI**

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INTRODUCTION

Meaningful employment is a part of life many of us take for granted. Working provides the opportunity for social interaction, cognitive stimulation, increased self-esteem, and of course monetary and non-monetary compensation. Many individuals who have sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI) experience significant barriers in returning to work, while others have had remarkable success.

The eleven case study subjects include five individuals who successfully returned to work following SCI, and four persons with SCI who were unsuccessful due to various barriers. In two cases, the individual returned to work only to find insurmountable financial issues, physical barriers, or job demands that exceeded capabilities. Questions were asked regarding educational level, employment history, functional status, Department of Rehabilitation involvement, and obstacles or disincentives encountered.

We've included an example case-study in each category, as well as a summary of all the findings in that category.

*Please note that the names used in this booklet are fictional for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality among our study participants.



EMPLOYED CASE

Age 55

Highest Level of Education Ph.D.

Employed at time of injury? No, Student in High School

Current employment status? Self-employed; private practice psychologist as well as working in 2 other settings

How long at current position? 18 years

Other positions held Director of Mission Fulfillment
Peer Counselor
Program Director



NARRATIVE

Mac returned to work about one year and three months after his injury. "Rehab was a lot longer in those days," he commented. He recalls a slight amount of prejudice in his return to work, but the major problem for him was the question inside his heart, "Can I do it?" When asked what it was like to start working, Mac stated "At first, it was scary. In general, however, I was treated well by co-workers, supervisors, and my employer." For the success he has enjoyed, he credits "naiveté, luck, and a lot of support from my family."

HOW'S LIFE NOW?

Mac says that his lifestyle is different than it was prior to injury- both better and worse, and on balance, better. He disliked being a student, preferring to teach. Because of his job, he is now able to do much more than he was able to do before his injury. Does his job provide enough money to meet all his needs? "No. I want a BMW van!"

Although his employment doesn't provide health insurance, he is covered through the group plan offered through his wife's employer.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

"Be scared, observant, and appreciate the support you'll get. Work hard and be deserving of the good you get."



FINDINGS FROM ALL EMPLOYED CASES

WHAT DIFFICULTIES OR OBSTACLES DID YOU EXPERIENCE WITH RETURNING BACK TO WORK?

For some of our study participants, accessibility was an issue. Some found institutions and older buildings to be rather inaccessible. For one study participant, the employer went to great lengths to make accommodations for accessibility. Still, however, the carpets in the building made it very difficult to push a manual chair and so help was needed for getting to and from meetings until he eventually purchased a power wheelchair. It was a question of whether or not he was able to be competitive. And for another person's situation, since the offices were upstairs at his workplace, the employer made a basket and used a fork lift to get him up to his office. Now that's going the extra mile!

Transportation was another issue that came up. Finding reliable transportation was difficult for some, and seemed even impossible in other situations. Also, travel becomes more complicated after a spinal cord injury and some employers had unrealistic expectations of how much their disabled employees should travel.

Mental barriers were greater than physical barriers for some of the cases. "How will others perceive what I can, and can not do?" "What if I have a bowel or bladder accident?"



FINDINGS FROM ALL EMPLOYED CASES

TO WHAT DO YOU CREDIT YOUR SUCCESS WITH GOING/RETURNING TO WORK?

- Able to perform same type of job duties as before injury
- Strong ambition
- Strong work ethic
- Motivated by desire to become employable
- Support from Family
- Strong educational background
- Already had a job to return to
- Personal adaptability
- Co-workers and supervisors went to great lengths to accommodate

Getting back to Mac, he also received assistance from the Department of Rehabilitation in the state of South Dakota, which he found to be “friendly and supportive.”

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?

“If you’re able to go back to the same type of work, take the time to get your body into shape rather than rush back in. If retraining is necessary, look at professional types of jobs (i.e.– software or computer-related).”



EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES CASE

Age 37

Highest Level of Education B.A.

Employed at time of injury? Yes, part-time employment and student

Current employment status? Part-time employment for a limited amount of money to retain benefits

How long at current position? 5 years

Other positions held Disability Advisory Committee: Co-Chair, Empowerment Team for Independent Living Center. Before Injury: Construction, Mechanic, restaurant work



NARRATIVE

Patrick was injured in an ATV accident about 18 years ago. At the time, he was working part-time and going to school. He has always been very interested in sports and outdoor activities. In fact, his cervical spinal cord injury has not stopped him from scuba diving or even skydiving. However, limitations in what he is allowed to earn, set by social service agencies intending to help him, have created disincentives to employment.

HOW'S LIFE NOW?

Patrick says that his lifestyle is better now than it was prior to his injury. Because of his decision to pursue education, he has enjoyed the ability to interact with professionals and the ability to be independent. He has also pursued various traveling opportunities. He has also appreciated the opportunity to have his golden retriever canine companion. Patrick's relationship and bond with his family has also improved since he was injured.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Use the Department of Rehabilitation. They provided financial help to return to school, purchase a modified van, computer and software, school-related travel expenses, and supplies. You need to be the driving force if you want assistance from DR, so be persistent.



FINDINGS FROM ALL EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES CASES

WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE OTHERS HAD?

One respondent noted that returning to work for 12-14 hours per day was his way of coping with his injury. Although he says this helped him get through the first couple of years, he admits that this may have caused him to prolong the acceptance of his injury. For Bill, returning to work would mean losing the benefits from his previous place of employment which are very substantial. He states that he would need to earn at least \$70,000 a year to make it worthwhile to return to work. In essence, there was a built-in incentive not to return to work. For another individual, pain was a major obstacle to returning to work and although her employer was accommodating in many ways, they refused to provide an ergonomic workstation.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR BARRIERS?

- Lack of adequate transportation
- Mental barriers—can I do the job?
- Concerns over bowel and bladder control
- Loss of benefits— especially medical coverage
- Fear of losing benefits
- Inaccessibility
- Pain



FINDINGS FROM ALL EMPLOYMENT DIFFICULTIES CASES

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?

“There are not a lot of positive aspects of returning to work, especially if you live in a rural area.” This person has a family with three kids to support and cannot take an entry level salary.

“Make sure you protect your benefits before you get a job—this can be very confusing trying to balance how much work you can do [and still retain your benefits].”

“Connect with DR (Department of Rehabilitation).”

When contacting agencies such as Social Security, get as much information as possible in writing, keep a log, and try to work with one representative from each agency in order to minimize confusion.



UNEMPLOYED CASE

Age 36

Highest Level of Education M.A.

Employed at time of injury? Yes, part-time employment as a deli clerk and a full-time student

Current employment status? Unemployed; looking for an accounting job

Have you desired to return to work or school since your injury? Yes

How are you coping? Helping people out on a volunteer basis; also doing under-the-table jobs.



NARRATIVE

Sandy was injured six years ago in a motor vehicle accident. She now lives in low-income housing, but will be forced to move if she starts earning more than \$710 per month.

HOW'S LIFE NOW?

Sandy says her lifestyle now is worse than it was prior to her injury because before she was injured, she could work without any concerns regarding benefits—and making [significantly] more than \$710 per month. She also says that she can't afford to do the things she used to do. She has to watch her money and can't spend as much as she wants. She misses being able to go out to dinner whenever she wants.

WHAT ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION?

The relationship Sandy has had with DR has been a good one, her case is still open. They have paid for her transportation to job interviews. Also, they paid for tuition, books, a computer, and transportation to get to and from school.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

"It's very hard," Sandy says, "because we need benefits—loss of benefits is a big issue—especially medical coverage."



FINDINGS FROM ALL UNEMPLOYED CASES

WHAT EXPERIENCES HAVE OTHERS HAD?

Other folks have had similar issues with being limited as to how much they can earn and still retain their medical benefits. Many report that they are earning significantly less than they were prior to injury, and this obviously has an impact on what they can afford to do. To cope, some have resorted to “working under the table,” limiting themselves to contract work, or working for far less than their talents and experience warrant. Other folks have decided to volunteer, which can have social, emotional, and physical benefits including improved self-esteem, but considerable financial limitations.

WHO PAYS FOR YOUR MEDICAL CARE?

Most, if not all of our respondents stated that Medi-cal or Medicare, or both, pay for their medical needs. Attendant care needs are usually picked up by IHSS (In Home Supportive Services), but all of these services require the individual to be steeped in poverty in order to retain their blessing.

FINDINGS FROM ALL UNEMPLOYED CASES

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?

“Utilize Department of Rehabilitation resources—particularly vocational assessment tools.”

“Talk to other individuals with SCI who have returned to work to gain insight into the process.”

“Be persistent. You need to overcome the mental obstacles.”

“Look for the type of job you’re capable of doing.”



DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION OFFICES

Many individuals have received excellent assistance in returning to work or school from the Department of Rehabilitation. Why not call the office that's closest to you?

Department of Rehabilitation Website	www.rehab.cahwnet.gov This website provides a full listing of DR offices. If you don't have Internet access, call us at 1-800-352-1956 x24.
Department of Rehabilitation	100 Paseo de Antonio, Ste. 324 San Jose, CA 95113-1479
Department of Rehabilitation Santa Rosa Office	50 "D" Street, #425 Santa Rosa, CA 95404-4764 707-576-2233
Department of Rehabilitation Oakland Office	1515 Clay St., Rm. 119 Oakland, CA 94612 510-622-2764
Department of Rehabilitation Pleasant Hill Office	2285 Morello Avenue Pleasant Hill, CA 94523-1896 925-602-3953
Department of Rehabilitation Sacramento Office	2225 19th Street Sacramento, CA 95818-1690 916-322-8500
Department of Rehabilitation San Francisco Office	185 Berry Street—Lobby 7, #180 San Francisco, CA 94107 415-904-7100
Department of Rehabilitation Chico Office	470 Rio Lindo Avenue, Ste. 4 Chico, CA 95926-1899 530-895-5507
Department of Rehabilitation Fresno Office	2550 Mariposa Street, #2000 Fresno, CA 93721-2270 209-445-6011
Department of Rehabilitation Santa Barbara Office	5638 Hollister Avenue, Ste. 200 Goleta, CA 93117-3474 805-681-8700



RESOURCES

More employment resources, just for you...

**Bay Area Coalition for
the Employment of Per-
sons with Disabilities**

Contact SVILC: 650-617-8340
P.O. Box 8007
San Jose, CA 95155-8007
www.deanza.fhda.edu/programs/cdep/baced.html

Objectives:

Identify Job opportunities for job applicants by coordinating efforts with Bay Area employers. Assist employers with implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Increase awareness of resources and issues related to disability and employment.

**Employment Develop-
ment Department**

916-653-0707
Labor exchange service/ job placement

**Governor's Committee
for Employment of
Disabled Persons**

916-654-8055
Information and Referral

**Limited Examination
and Application Pro-
gram (LEAP)**

916-445-0538 x300
Helps individuals with disabilities secure State jobs.

**ILR Program on
Employment and
Disability**

Cornell University
102 ILR Extension
Ithaca, NY 14853-3901
607-255-2891
www.ilr.cornell.edu/PED/ADA

Our mission is to provide a learning environment which cultivates and facilitates inclusive and accessible communities for individuals with disabilities.



MORE RESOURCES

Project Hired

www.impactonline.org/prohired
408-557-0880
408-557-0710 (FAX)
e-mail: prohired@ix.netcom.com
Assists individuals with disabilities to secure jobs appropriate to their qualifications and career goals. They also maintain a range of services for job placement and career development

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

1331 "F" St., NW, Ste. 300
Washington, DC 20004-1107
202-376-6200
202-376-6859 (FAX)
E-mail: kirk-faith@pcepd.gov
www.pcepd.gov

Social Security Administration

www.ssa.gov/work
Our Mission is to promote the employment of Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities.

National Job Opportunities, Diversity Direct

www.jwtworks.com
JWT Specialized Communications
6500 Wilshire Blvd., 21st Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90046
800-676-7080 x300
Listing of professional job openings from over a dozen major national corporations. Available free of charge for job seekers with disabilities.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

www.jan.wvu.edu/english/homeus.htm
800-526-7234
The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is not a job placement service, but an international toll-free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations and the employability of people with disabilities.

Mainstream

www.mainstreaminc.org
Moving People with Disabilities into the Workplace



VIDEO RESOURCES

A number of videos are also available to help you in your return to work.

Enable

People with Disabilities and Computers
With the Flying Karamazov Brothers
www.microsoft.com/enable/productions

Disclosing Abilities

(1995) \$25 Designed to help individuals with disabilities have successful job interviews

Instructional Materials Laboratory
University of Missouri-Columbia
2316 Industrial Dr.
Columbia, MO 65202
800-669-2465
314-882-2883
573-8821992 (FAX)

Everyone can Work **\$79**

HDI Publishers
P.O. Box 131401
Houston, TX 77219
713-682-8700
713-956-2288

BONUS RESOURCE

Alliance for Community Care

Judy Pyeatt, M.A.
150-A So. Autumn
San Jose, CA 95110
408-938-8500, ext. 225
408-286-8988 (FAX)
e-mail: judyp@alliance4.org

Judy has expertise as a Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist and Benefits Coordinator and she comes with high recommendation from one of our current staff members. Give her a call!



SPECIAL UPDATE

Consider applying for a position at the next National Leadership Conference for Youth with Disabilities. The conference is a yearly gathering of young people with disabilities age 18-24 who are chosen competitively. Full scholarships, including travel are offered to participants. They learn leadership skills, meet with their elected representatives, explore national policies affecting their lives, and network.

THE GOAL OF THE...conference is to help prepare the next generation of disability community leaders by involving them in a series of activities designed to build self-confidence and leadership skills as well as to promote career development and opportunities for employment. Participation in this National Conference will afford eligible applicants with an exciting opportunity to meet with and learn from national disability leaders, public officials, and other young leaders with disabilities from all over the country.

FOR FURTHER...information about the conference itself, call Dale S. Brown, contact for the President's Committee, at 202-376-6200 ext. 30. Or, if you have access to the Internet you can surf over to:

WWW50.PCEPD.GOV/PCEPD/



ONLINE RESUME / JOB BANKS

Challenge 2000

<http://www2.interaccess.com/netown>

**Diversity Direct Na-
tional Job Opportunities
Listing**

<http://www.diversitydirect.com>

Independence Bank

<http://www.ind-bank.org>

**National Business &
Disability Council**

[http://www.business-disability.com/home.
asp](http://www.business-disability.com/home.asp)

New Mobility's Jobline

<http://www.newmobility.com/jobline>

**University of Minnesota
Disability Service Ca-
reers OnLine**

<http://disserv3.stu.umn.edu/COL>



Are you faced with bridges, or barriers to gainful employment after spinal cord injury? This booklet attempts to describe a number of different situations where real people have tried, and in some cases succeeded, in going to work after sustaining a spinal cord injury. We hope that this booklet will be helpful in your own journey to...

Employment

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