



# WORLD INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY

Promoting integration, independence and productivity of people with disabilities throughout the world

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## Report identifies strategies to increase employment for Latinos with disabilities

Latinos are the fastest growing population in the United States, but they often have lower levels of educational attainment, are more likely to live near or below poverty level, and are disproportionately affected by chronic health conditions. For Latinos with disabilities in this country, their double minority status even further increases their likelihood of unemployment, poverty, and inadequate health care.

In response to the need for a comprehensive examination of the topic, Proyecto Visión recently released *Latinos with Disabilities in the United States: Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Employment*. The report is an extensive gathering of research and statistical data on disabled Latinos and employment and is enriched with the first-hand knowledge that Proyecto Visión and its regional partners have gleaned from five years of providing localized technical assistance to disabled Latinos across the country.

"In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau released data showing that 24 percent of working-age Latinos in the United States had a disability compared to 18.6 percent for all groups," says Arturo Lopez, administrator for the largely rural San Joaquin Valley district of the California Department of Rehabilitation. "Working-age Latinos are becoming disabled from injuries in dangerous work environments and heavy manual labor, including farm work; lack of access to medical care and insurance; complex health conditions such as HIV/AIDS, diabetes and obesity; and violence, including the effects of firearms."

Despite these formidable hardships,

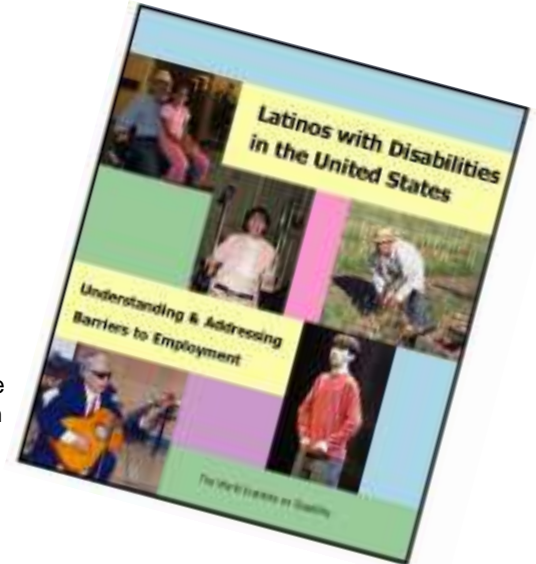
many Latinos are deeply reluctant to ask for help, the report says, while few disability or vocational service agencies offer culturally relevant Spanish-language outreach and information materials. Even the mainstream concept of independent living runs counter to the values of many Latino cultures. As a result, families often bear incredible burdens as they try to manage illness and disability without any outside support.

There are, however, signs of improvement and possibility. *Latinos with Disabilities in the United States* highlights innovative research and employment projects that are working to reduce barriers and presents numerous profiles of Latinos who have found success.

"I am very impressed with the comprehensiveness and the quality of this report. Most important, I am impressed by the message of hope, the promise of real equality of opportunity," says Fredric Schroeder, former commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration. "The report offers a comprehensive resource for professionals and minority individuals themselves as they work toward first-class status in society. Thank you for such an important contribution to improving opportunities for minority individuals with disabilities."

The report also makes four concrete recommendations on ways to improve the situation for disabled Latinos:


- **Improve Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Latinos** by increasing cultural responsiveness, including culturally diverse interpretations of independent living and developing more Latino role models within the system.



- **Re- envision the Disability Community's Approach to Latinos** by adopting effective outreach methods, integrating culturally appealing messages, and bringing more Latinos with disabilities into leadership positions.

- **Build the Latino Community's Capacity for Including People with Disabilities** by introducing disability topics into the Latino community, educating Latino community leaders about disability issues and building networks between job developers and Latino business entities.

- **Increase Overall Visibility of Disabled Latino Leaders** by cultivating additional public policy advocates who are Latinos with disabilities and increasing participation of youth in leadership and mentoring programs.

Early reviews have been enthusiastic. "Congratulations for bringing attention to barriers affecting Latinos with disabilities," says Irma Resendez of Familia Unida Living with Multiple Sclerosis. "Your commitment to bringing awareness to real issues affecting Latinos, especially those living with various types of disabilities, is an excellent example of social justice in the making." 

## Encouraging dialogue, providing solutions

WID's California Work Incentives Initiative really hit its stride in 2006 with new tools to increase the availability of accurate information on combining work and benefits for people with disabilities. The group unveiled two interactive "calculators" on the DisabilityBenefits101.org website: one geared towards people moving from benefits to work and another aimed at people in the gap between jobs.

The calculators cut through the complex and confusing rules to show clear outcomes over time. Visitors to the website can enter details about their own specific situations—such as the amount of financial benefits they receive or health care programs in which they are enrolled—and see how changing their employment status will alter their overall

situation immediately and in the upcoming years.

Program staff complemented the new website tools with a nearly non-stop schedule of benefits trainings for service providers across the state. Program Manager Bryon MacDonald demonstrates the calculator features in training sessions to illustrate different life scenarios. He uses Deanna, a fictional middle-aged woman with a disability, as one example. Like many people with disabilities, Deanna receives a combination of state and federal benefits: SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance), and a Section 8 housing voucher that helps with her rent. She is considering accepting part-time work as a homeless shelter counselor—her dream job—at a salary of \$1,600 per month.

Although each of Deanna's benefits have their own complex work rules, the DB101 calculator presents user-friendly results. A simple graph and short explanations show that, initially, she will be better off financially. But after her second year of work, she will be no better or worse off than she was before taking the job—although now she is living mostly on her salary rather than relying on benefit programs. The calculator also shows how her health benefits will be affected. In this case, Deanna has the same health care coverage as before taking the job.

Such results spark surprising discussions among even the most experienced planners. One service provider said, "I am

### California's SB 1270 mandates benefit and employment counseling for people with developmental disabilities

Working with partners from the California Work Group, WID made significant language contributions to SB 1270 (Chesbro) to extend benefits planning information services to Regional Center clients statewide and via the Internet. SB1270 requires the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, with the support of the Department of Developmental Services, to convene a stakeholder workgroup that will develop alternative and expanded options for non-residential services and supports for persons with developmental disabilities. SB 1270 was signed into law on September 22, 2006.

not going to show these calculator results to my clients," prompting lively debate as participants considered the pros and cons of the job offer, including the projected impact on Deanna's benefits, the acquisition of new job skills, and the potential for raises, networking, and career advancement.

"Using the online calculator in the training mix is a real eye opener," says Maria Iriarte of California's Protection and Advocacy, a collaborator in DB101 trainings. "It's an invaluable tool!"

"We have never seen whole training rooms debate these work and benefit outcomes with this level of confidence," adds MacDonald. "Participants feel they know what all these results are about."

Four more calculators are currently in development with the next one focusing on youth with disabilities entering the workforce. These successful calculators are a model for other states as well: as we end 2006, WID is providing a calculator for the state of New Jersey, incorporating that state's particular benefits rules. 🌐



**Bryon MacDonald leads a lively discussion as he demonstrates the DB101 online benefits calculator (above). The graph produced by the calculator (below) shows Deanna's estimated income over the next five years.**



## **New media combats an old problem**

Abuse of people with disabilities creates a significant barrier to independent living and full integration in the community, yet is shockingly widespread. Building on a strong foundation of practical and insightful disability research, WID's newest research project focuses on ways to reduce the incidence of abuse and empower people with disabilities who receive personal assistance services.

Headed by Dr. Marsha Saxton, the Curriculum on Abuse Prevention and Empowerment (CAPE) educates service providers and people with disabilities about safety awareness and abuse prevention strategies. The curriculum is being developed with input from a diverse group of stakeholders and draws on existing community resources and best practices from the fields of disability and domestic violence.

Early project activities have gathered personal narratives of abuse and successful interventions from around the world. A short video program, produced in collaboration with STAND! Against Domestic Violence, focuses on the need to recognize and talk about abuse. It is available on CD and can be shown in educational settings, by domestic violence services, by social service providers, or in any number of other contexts.

A workbook featuring cartoons, learning games and empowering stories is under development. The project utilizes a variety of media to communicate effectively with different audiences of people with disabilities who may have diverse learning styles and needs.

In the upcoming year, the materials will



be tested at a wide range of disability community events, rehabilitation sessions, schools and Independent Living Centers. Ultimately, project materials will be translated into Spanish, and all products will be available online.

CAPE is bringing the serious, damaging issue of abuse into the light. Escaping an abusive relationship can be one important step as a person with a disability gains a sense of self-esteem and self-determination. 🌐



**Disability awareness training at a summer youth camp in Abkhazia.**

### **Disability film festivals draw a crowd**

The use of disability media to educate the public and break down social isolation was a major component of the activist training project. Each team created unique videos and PSAs promoting inclusive education. Teams also hosted disability film exhibitions, screening disability films from around the world for nearly 10,000 members of the general public; some were even shown on national television in these countries. Our disability NGO partners continue to use these disability films to educate people about social tolerance, non-discrimination and a wide variety of disability issues.

### *International Projects:*

## **Young activists make big changes**

Emerging disabled activists in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Uzbekistan have transformed their own lives as well as the communities they live in. Several years ago, some of these young people rarely left their houses. Now, many of them earn their own money and are able to contribute to their households for the first time. They now have goals and dreams for the future.

These young disabled people have been empowered through WID's recently completed three-year project to develop advocacy skills among activist teams in these countries. These teams have put their new skills to good use: a major focus of activity has been to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities. In partnership with the Russian disability NGO Perspektiva, WID has given disabled youths, parents and other community members the tools to challenge discrimination and eliminate social and physical barriers to equal education. The project has involved more than 15,000 teachers, journalists and

students through disability awareness trainings, workshops, film festivals and other public education events. The disabled activist teams have also learned how to use the media effectively, conducted peer support groups for 2500 youth with disabilities and, as part of their community projects, have built dozens of access ramps to public buildings and schools.

In 2004, the project expanded to include teams from Georgia and Abkhazia. Despite the current conflict between their governments, these two new teams have developed additional cooperative activities to achieve common goals of social integration and inclusive education.

Armed with these new skills, the teams and the NGOs they represent continue to advocate for public policy changes, and some have become involved in developing new legislation in their regions and countries. 🌐

Access to Assets:

## Gaining visibility and creating influence to reduce poverty for people with disabilities

People with disabilities were brought into the mainstream of the asset-building world when the World Institute on Disability was a primary sponsor of the Asset Learning Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, in September 2006. Organized by the Corporation For Enterprise Development (CFED), the event brought 1000 attendees together with representatives from disability organizations, governmental agencies, affiliated non-profits, and credit unions, making it the largest and most inclusive asset building conference to date.

"It felt great to be a part of this conference from the ground up, rather than to have to force people to include the issue of disability in their advocacy work," says Executive Director Kathy Martinez. "CFED made sure that disability was an integral part of the entire conference—not just a token topic or an afterthought."

Asset building is a strategy that helps low-income people save and purchase long-term assets. As a complement to increasing income, this provides the stability to escape the cycle of poverty. Many clients of asset-building programs are people with disabilities, and their unique financial situations present particular challenges.

WID conducted extensive outreach to the disability community prior to the conference, and event organizers followed through with outstanding accessibility: CFED provided any requested accommodations, had lift-equipped vans for special events and travel from alternative hotel sites, and made sure that the resort accommodations were superb.


WID staff also provided expert leadership in several conference activities. Access to Assets Program Manager Megan O'Neil presented workshops on asset limits on public benefits (SSI & Medicaid) and financial literacy, and facilitated roundtable discussions on earned income tax credit



Access to Assets project manager Megan O'Neil accepts the Paul G. Hearne/AAPD Leadership Award from Tony Coelho at a gala reception on March 8, 2006, in Washington, D.C. The award recognizes emerging leaders who have already made a positive impact in the disability field, developed effective collaborations, and demonstrated a promising vision for the disability community. O'Neil was honored for her leadership in breaking down barriers that prevent people with disabilities from building financial assets and escaping poverty. It is Megan's goal to eliminate asset tests on structured savings vehicles and to exclude all limited access savings accounts from SSI asset calculations. She emphasizes the necessity for increased advocacy and awareness, and more interaction with high-level policymakers.

outreach to people with disabilities on utilizing the Medicaid Buy-In as an asset-building strategy. Executive Director Kathy Martinez presented on the Asset Accumulation and Tax Policy Project panel.

Other specific issues addressed included accessible financial literacy curricula and accommodating people with disabilities in mainstream programs by providing accurate benefit information, physical accommodations and alternative formats.

WID's strong presence helped expand awareness of the needs of people with disabilities in asset-building programs. The lively networking and enthusiastic response of event attendees point towards a bright future for people with disabilities and their opportunities to become economically empowered. 



### WID to launch new website in January 2007!

Point your browser to [www.wid.org](http://www.wid.org) for the quickest way to find comprehensive information on all of WID's programs, as well as a wide range of online tools and resources—including video and other multimedia features—related to disability, healthcare, benefits, employment, rights and independent living. This dynamic online presence will reflect the outstanding quality of WID's groundbreaking work and multiply the number of people the organization is able to serve and reach.

To achieve the highest level of web accessibility, the new website will include features such as text-to-speech software that allows users with vision disabilities to navigate and browse the entire site with or without a screen reader. By demonstrating extensive accessibility features, WID hopes its new website will serve as a model of online accessibility and encourage advancement of accessible technology.