MAKING JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR MENTALLY RETARDED PEOPLE A REALITY...

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Preface

Independence is highly cherished in our country. It is a source of self-esteem. In our culture, an individual's independence is largely measured by his or her ability to work and be self-supporting. Today, there are many mentally retarded people who want to work, are ready for work, and could be employed in the competitive job market. However, when a retarded person seeks out employment, he often finds prejudice, fear and discrimination. The general public and most employers still have misconceptions about mental retardation. It is still believed that retarded people can't learn, or that they are dangerous, mentally ill or subhuman. As a result of these attitudes, retarded individuals are often perceived as undesirable or high risk employees.

Fortunately, some mentally retarded workers have been given a chance to prove themselves. In the vast majority of cases, they have been good employees, often achieving more favorable work records than their nonretarded peers in similar situations. In addition, mentally retarded people are working in a wide variety of jobs which were recently considered too complicated for them to perform. The old practice of restricting these workers to janitorial and food services is no longer justified.

There is no question that mentally retarded people can be productive employees. They must be given the opportunity to seek gainful employment and earn their independence.

The Association for Retarded Citizens at the state and local levels can ensure that the vocational needs of mentally retarded individuals are being met. Employers need to be persuaded to hire retarded workers. Misconceptions about mental retardation must be corrected. Inappropriate and outmoded rehabilitation practices have to be eliminated. Finally, every mentally retarded person must be encouraged to develop to his full potential.

This publication can help ARC members and other interested groups to develop new employment opportunities for mentally retarded people. General information is provided to give volunteers a basic understanding of vocational education, job training and the placement process. Guidelines are suggested on how volunteers can create employment opportunities, as well as ensure appropriate placement of retarded workers when jobs become available. Ways in which volunteers can help a retarded person adjust to his new job are also included.

Preparing Mentally Retarded People for Work

Before beginning a volunteer program to increase employment opportunities, it will be necessary to consider some important background information. Some key issues which will be discussed in this section are:

- What are the capabilities and limitations of retarded employees?
- What mistakes have been made in the past in habilitation practices?
- What is the general process of vocational education?

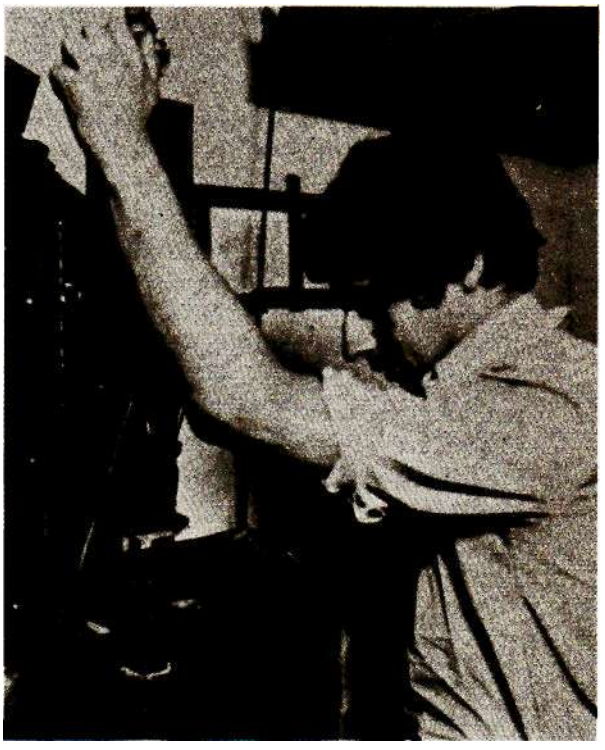
Gaining basic knowledge in these areas will help ensure the development of an effective and successful employment program.

The Mentally Retarded Worker

With adequate training, mildly, moderately and many severely retarded people can successfully compete for jobs in business and industry. Before entering the competitive job market, some retarded individuals need vocational training in sheltered workshops. These facilities offer controlled working environments where relevant work attitudes and behaviors are taught, such as the importance of completing a task, good grooming, being on time, cooperating with others, and following instructions. Sheltered workshops are also an alternative for those individuals who are incapable of competing for employment in business and industry.

While the majority of mentally retarded people can be placed in regular job settings, it is important to realize that their work capabilities will vary considerably. For example, mildly retarded persons can generally be expected to adapt to work situations more rapidly and learn to perform more complicated tasks than moderately or severely retarded individuals. Moderately retarded people have similar advantages over those who are severely retarded. However, an individual's level of mental retardation should not be used as the only basis for predicting employability or the type of work for which the person is best suited. The extent to which several important motivational factors, such as interest, attentiveness and desire to succeed, are present or absent can positively or negatively affect performance. Thus, when attempting to create new job opportunities for mentally retarded people, their intellectual abilities and personality characteristics should be closely considered on an individual basis.

Profoundly mentally retarded people, particularly those with extreme physical handicaps, may not be able to work for pay, but can learn to develop work skills. Some have been taught highly structured work routines that require simple object identification, sorting or disassembly of parts.



Traditional Attitudes And Practices

Until sheltered workshops were established in the 1950s, the vocational potentials of mentally retarded people were generally unrecognized and wasted. It was not until the late 1960s that large-scale efforts were made to prepare retarded individuals for competitive employment. Although it would seem great progress was made during the '50s and '60s, this is not the case. The vocational training and placement practices of the time unnecessarily restricted retarded people to only a few types of employment. Teachers and placement personnel had low expectations and negative attitudes about what the retarded worker was capable of doing. The following discussion provides an overview of some of the attitudes and practices that have limited employment opportunities in the past. Positive changes have been made, but some of these restricting factors still exist today.

Inappropriate education. Traditionally, mentally retarded students' academic and vocational education have occurred during separate stages, with vocational training being postponed until the last years of the educational process. Often the public school has considered such training to be the responsibility of another agency (e.g., a sheltered workshop). Vocational education should begin very early and be coordinated with the academic curriculum of the retarded student. In order for vocational and academic learning objectives to be complimentary, it is important that they be coordinated by one agency, the school.

Impersonal approach to job placement. There has been insufficient concern over whether or not retarded workers receive some personal satisfaction from their work. More consideration should be given to the retarded person's interests and choices in the placement process. The tendency of some professionals to identify jobs and quickly "close" rehabilitation cases has overshadowed the retarded client's personal needs. Such procedures have been justified on the grounds that the job market is too small to allow for personal preferences in placement. However, these practices have often caused job dissatisfaction.

Over-emphasis of menial tasks. When contacting prospective employers, it has been a common practice of professionals to describe retarded employees as being well suited to simple, repetitive jobs which are boring and undesirable to the intellectually normal worker. This sales approach conveys a negative image, implying that the retarded person is devoid of feelings.

There are **some** retarded employees who do not progress beyond entry level positions, which often involve repetition and menial tasks. However, other retarded individuals do have the desire and abilities necessary for promotions.

Information about a prospective retarded employee should emphasize the individual strengths of that person. Presenting a negative stereotypic image of retarded workers may cause an employer to nave low expectations. He may never consider retarded employees for promotion even though they may have the required qualifications.

Discrepancies in training objectives and actual jobs. Mentally retarded people have frequently been taught specific skills that have no relevance to available jobs in the community. Vocational education should concentrate on teaching students the basics of what is expected of an employee in most jobs, such as promptness, good attendance and other work-related behaviors. Specific skills are usually learned in an actual employment situation.

Misuse of sheltered employment. As mentioned previously, the sheltered workshop should serve the vocational needs of mentally retarded people in two ways: as a transitional training center for clients preparing for regular employment or as long-term work for those who cannot compete for jobs. Most sheltered workshops fulfill these responsibilities. However, a few have not always served the best interests of their clients. The more capable workers have sometimes been retained for income and productivity purposes instead of being trained and placed in the competitive labor market. The subcontract work and other tasks performed in some workshops have been considered to be of limited value in helping trainees prepare for outside employment. These practices have discouraged the more ambitious workshop clients, who want to learn and graduate into community living and competitive work.

The Process of Vocational Preparation

Vocational preparation for mentally retarded people should be a long-term, intensive and continuous effort. It should be integrated into all of the retarded student's training and educational activities. Beginning as early in life as possible, it should continue into young adulthood, or whenever a person is ready to work. Vocational preparation is extremely important. If it is comprehensive and administered effectively, the mentally retarded student will learn to function as independently as possible in his adult life.

Beginning in Childhood

Many of a person's basic attitudes and traits are well-formed during early childhood. For this reason, vocational preparation should not be postponed until late adolescence or early adulthood. By that time, undesirable attitudes and behaviors may have already developed. Valuable time and energy is lost in eliminating and replacing bad habits that could have been prevented earlier.

Vocational learning can begin in the home, when the retarded child is very young. Through his chores and responsibilities, he can learn how to accept and follow directions from an authority figure. He can develop his decision-making skills through problems he encounters. His parents can stress the importance of completing a task. The child should also be allowed to experience success in his efforts and be encouraged to develop more complex skills. Learning experiences such as these should help the child adapt easier to school when his formal education begins.

It is extremely important that parents and professionals guard against having low expectations for a mentally retarded child's development during the preschool years. For example, some professionals with insufficient knowledge about mental retardation may have a very pessimistic outlook on how much mentally retarded people can learn and do. This negative outlook can influence the way parents perceive and treat their retarded child. On the other hand, some parents may be overprotective of their retarded offspring, providing few learning activities and encouraging extreme dependency. Early and long-term treatment of this nature will minimize the development of independence later in life.

The Primary School Years

A major purpose of primary education (grades 1-6) should be to foster retarded students' vocational and career expectations. Although basic academic subjects (reading, writing and arithmetic) are taught first in school, it is important that the practical use of these skills be stressed. Academic subject matter should be associated with real-life situations that relate to the home, work or leisure.

Elementary school children should have frequent opportunities to tour places of employment and observe people at work. Back at school, class discussion can supplement the students' observations and answer their questions. Teachers should also emphasize the importance of appearance, manners, hygiene, punctuality, etc. in a work situation.

The Secondary School Years

By the time retarded students enter the secondary level (grades 7-12), they should have a basic understanding about the nature of work. They should also have employment expectations for adulthood. Secondary education should continue to prepare retarded students for living and working in the community. It should not be considered the starting point for prevocational training and preparation.

Practical life skills should be taught throughout the secondary level, especially the last three or four years. Many mentally retarded adults have failed to adjust to community living because they were never adequately trained in practical skills required for daily existence. Budgeting, money management, general housekeeping, home safety, meal preparation and first aid are some of the living skills that should be taught. Whenever possible, direct experience should be provided in these areas. Students should also learn how to use community services relating to health care, leisure time and transportation.

Secondary education should provide direct work experience. The work/study program is one way of meeting this requirement. Under this program, students attend classes part-time and work the remainder of the day. The job may be within the school or the community. Regardless of its location, it should approximate real employment conditions present in business and industry. In some work/study programs, the early phase offers direct experience in several types of work, so that students can begin to choose realistic vocational interests. Later in the program, work experience is concentrated in a particular job area. During the process, vocational counsellors can effectively assess student interest, aptitude and capabilities. The work/study program also helps retarded individuals further develop attitudes and behaviors which are critical to successful job placement and adjustment (e.g., being on time, following instructions, completing tasks and exercising good physical hygiene). Achieving readiness for employment should be the primary goal for this training rather than the development of skills for a specific job.

The School/Work Transition

Most mentally retarded students should be ready to work in a specific job upon graduation from high school. They should also have the basic knowledge and skills necessary to live in the community. Some retarded individuals will require continuing, short-term assistance in making the transition from school to living and working in the community. Post-school services should be available, and include at least adult education classes, sheltered employment opportunities and on-the-job training.

In many areas of the country, community colleges or service agencies are providing continuing education for mentally retarded young adults. The curriculum is generally an extension of high school subjects and activities, designed to increase proficiencies in both daily living and vocational areas. Remedial training is sometimes offered for those who have failed academic subjects in secondary education. An adult education program should be tailored to meet the unique academic and vocational needs of each student. Continuing education is generally very successful because the adult student is more highly motivated and mature than the retarded adolescent in high school.

Sheltered work should primarily include continuing prevocational training, assessment and counselling. It is for individuals who are not ready for employment after finishing their formal education. Even with additional training, some retarded people may never be able to compete in the job market, and sheltered work may become a long-term alternative for them. This is a critically important phase, since its outcome can have a lifelong effect. Parents, advocates and professionals should ensure that sheltered workshop clients receive adequate and appropriate training for regular employment.

When clients of sheltered workshops are job-ready, they should be graduated into competitive employment. The final phase of vocational preparation can be achieved by on-the-job training. This type of program places a retarded person in a regular job with an initial training period that allows the employee time to learn the work he is supposed to do. During the training phase, the employer can receive financial assistance from the state vocational rehabilitation agency or the On-the-Job Training Project, which is sponsored by the Association for Retarded Citizens (see Appendix A for a listing " of regional OJT Offices).

The Outcome of Effective Preparation

It has been conservatively estimated that 75% of the retarded adults in this country could become self-supporting. Another 10-15% could become partially self-supporting if they receive appropriate and adequate training throughout their early years of development. The mentally retarded people who have been properly educated and are gainfully employed have proven that they are productive and desirable employees. For example, the federal government employed 7,500 retarded employees in a special program over a ten-year period. When evaluating the program, it was found that 93% of these workers successfully mastered their jobs. Only 7% were terminated because of unsatisfactory performance. Supervisors in the program offered favorable ratings for the retarded employees' work attitudes and behaviors, including taking directions, being on time, meeting attendance requirements, getting along with supervisory staff and co-workers, being enthusiastic about work and completing work tasks. In some areas, the performance of retarded workers was superior to that of nonhandicapped employees. Similar results have been achieved in private enterprise. For example, the ARC National On-the-Job Training Project has placed approximately 25,000 retarded individuals in competitive jobs from 1969 to 1979. Most of these workers have been retained by employers who were willing to provide training.

Job Development and Placement

Once a retarded person has been prepared for work in school, it is important that he have the opportunity to find employment of his choosing. ARC local units can ensure that opportunities exist through aggressive job development and appropriate placement.

A Changing Outlook

We are witnessing the dawn of a new era of opportunity for mentally retarded adults. For decades, these individuals have been rejected by society. Some have been isolated in remote institutions. Adulthood has generally meant the end of education and training and the beginning of a dull, passive existence. It was felt that nothing more could be done for retarded adults. Due to these attitudes and practices, there has been a tremendous waste of human potential and financial resources.

As a result of court decisions and the efforts of advocates, mentally retarded citizens are now gaining their rightful place in society. However, winning the rights to live in the community does not guarantee public acceptance. Traditional rejection and isolation can continue, if vigorous efforts are not made to help retarded people become active and contributing members of society. The first step toward this goal is education. The second involves helping retarded individuals gain independence to the maximum extent possible. Creating employment opportunities should be the best way to accomplish this goal.

Two activities are generally involved in generating employment opportunities for mentally retarded people: 1) job development, the promotion of the retarded worker's capabilities to employers and the general public; and 2) job placement, the matching of a retarded individual's interests, capabilities and aptitudes to a specific job. These activities can occur separately or be merged into one continuous process. The volunteers and staff of ARC state and local units can assume a major role in job development. They can serve as key catalytic agents in job placement activities by assisting vocational preparation and job placement agencies. These two key concepts will be briefly defined in this section and greatly expanded upon in later sections.

Job Development

One approach for cultivating employer interest is through special group meetings in which the positive benefits of hiring retarded people are presented. A more direct and effective method is to meet with an employer who has a specific job opening and persuade him to interview a work-ready retarded person.

The former approach makes employers generally receptive to the idea of hiring retarded workers. The latter strategy encourages employers to consider placing work-ready retarded persons in specific job situations. The goal for either method is to persuade employers to interview mentally retarded applicants when appropriate jobs become available. Employers who are already familiar with the work capabilities of mentally retarded people should be asked to assist volunteers in either of these approaches.

Job Placement

Job placement begins when an employer realizes that a position can be filled by a retarded worker and is willing to cooperate with job placement personnel. At this point, a retarded individual who is best suited for the job needs to be identified. Placement personnel need information from the employer about the work environment and the job's responsibilities and requirements. Data describing and assessing the vocational training of retarded clients (i.e., from public school, sheltered workshop or vocational rehabilitation agency) are also needed. After a potential worker has been identified for the job and hired, placement personnel usually continue to assist the employer through the employee's orientation and training periods. In some instances, special training personnel are available on a short-term basis to provide on-the-job training and instruction.

The list of jobs which retarded people can perform continues to grow. Some, but certainly not all, of the various jobs* in which retarded workers have proven their capabilities and usefulness are as follows:

Animal Caretaker
Building Maintenance
Laundry Worker
Library Assistant
Key Punch Operator
Mail Clerk
Carpenter
Medical Technician
Clerk
Messenger
Cook
Nursery Worker
Dishwasher
Office Machine Operator
Elevator Operator
Painter
Engineering Aide
Farm Laborer
Sales Worker
Ground Maintenance
Stock Clerk
Janitor
Telephone Operator
Laboratory Worker
Vehicle Maintenance
Laborer
Warehouseperson
Domestic Worker
Baker
Packer
Textile Machine Tender
Silk Screen Operator
Manicurist
Usher
Dayworker
Upholsterer
Porter
Food Service Worker
Presser
Forest Worker
Printing Plant Worker
Furniture Repairperson
Radio Repairperson
Photocopy Operator
Welder
Routeperson
Assembler
Inspector
Sorter
Ward Attendant

Adapted from **Give An Opportunity-Gain An Asset,** National Association for Retarded Citizens, 1974.

Creating Job Opportunities Through Volunteer Efforts

A group of interested, well-trained and active volunteers can be very effective in creating job opportunities for mentally retarded people. As a highly organized ARC committee, the efforts of individual members and the group as a whole can serve one of mentally retarded persons' most important needs. This section provides detailed guidelines and information on forming a volunteer committee, as well as job development and placement activities in which volunteers can become involved.

Organizing a Committee

The Employment Committee must be a **working** group. Its membership should not be composed of people who only like to attend meetings, consider it a responsibility to serve on as many committees as possible, or want to be appointed because a friend is already a member.

Ideally, the Committee should have members who have good business contacts in the community. Most ARC units already have people like this in their membership. However, there may be other businesspeople or leaders in the community who would also be assets to the Committee. Vocational rehabilitation professionals can be valuable resources to the group, in addition to being directly involved in job development and placement.

Although a potential member's relationship to business is important, it should not be the only reason for his appointment. The success and effectiveness of the Committee's efforts will also depend upon each member's:

- positive attitude toward the potentials and achievements of mentally retarded people
- belief that mentally retarded individuals can and should become a member of the community's work force
- ability to effectively communicate with persons in business
- desire and ability to work cooperatively with vocational rehabilitation professionals

Membership should be kept to a minimum. However, if the Employment Committee is indeed a working group, size should not be a problem until the membership reaches twenty or more. Some factors that might determine the size of the group are: 1) community population; 2) the number of potential places where retarded people can work; and 3) how many retarded individuals need employment. Since inactivity can stagnate the enthusiasm of any committee, it is best not to appoint more members than are needed to do the job.

Anyone who is interested in creating job opportunities for mentally retarded persons should recommend the formation of an Employment Committee to the ARC's President or Board of Directors. The person making the recommendation should be prepared to fully discuss the Committee's purpose with the Board members. If a committee is established within the ARC structure, the Association's Board will have authority over the group and its activities.

Suggested Roles for the Employment Committee

Some communities have extensive services and programs to serve the vocational needs of their mentally retarded citizens. Others have few or none at all. If a wide array of vocational services are available, the Committee should focus on promotional activities that inform the public and employers about the positive qualities of mentally retarded workers. The Committee can also assist in job placement when needed. If only a few services exist, the members should be directly involved with job development and placement. There are many critical roles which a committee can play.

identifying Job-Ready People

The Committee needs to identify retarded people in the community who require jobs at the present time or in the future. Information should be obtained about each retarded person's vocational interests, job skills, employment preferences and other necessary personal data. Files containing this information might be located in the ARC or the Committee's operations headquarters. Due to laws requiring strict confidentiality of records, it may not be possible to obtain personal data and information on individuals being served by publicly supported agencies. In this event, the Committee should establish a working relationship with an agency's personnel and directly involve them in job placement activities.

Several types of service systems or agencies are valuable resources in identifying job-ready retarded workers. Some of the major ones include:

Public schools. Local high schools should be contacted to determine the types of vocational preparation or job training programs they sponsor.

Local vocational rehabilitation agencies. Most communities are served by a vocational rehabilitation office. This agency usually funds a variety of habilitation programs, such as sheltered workshops, work stations in industry, on-the-job training and other special job skill training projects. The agency also maintains referral lists of those who are in need of vocational rehabilitation services.

Sheltered workshops. Since sheltered work is where many well-trained and job-ready retarded people will be found, a working relationship should be established with the training and placement personnel. In large cities, it may be necessary to find potential sponsors in order to locate workshops. Typical sponsors are the ARC, vocational rehabilitation agencies, state, regional or county mental health/mental retardation centers, United Way and Goodwill.

Public and private residential facilities. The more progressive residential facilities which have community placement or outreach programs will offer prevocational, vocational and job training for residents. An institution may also operate sheltered workshops on its campus or in the community.

Small community-based group homes should also be surveyed to find out if their residents have been prepared for employment.

ARC membership. The membership of the local ARC should be asked about the employment requirements and capabilities of mentally retarded people living at home.

Promoting Work Capabilities

The most vital function of the Employment Committee is promoting the work capabilities of mentally retarded individuals to employers and the general public. Every available means should be used for launching promotional campaigns.

Speaking engagements. Verbal presentations to community groups are an effective means of reaching the public. A well-prepared and aggressive group of speakers can influence a very large segment of a community's population.

All members of the Committee should help contact prospective groups and make arrangements for speaking engagements. However, it is advisable to assign only those members with good public speaking skills to make the actual speeches. It is very important that an audience focus its attention on the message of a speech and not on an awkward or dull presentation style.

Target audiences for speaking engagements are employers, those responsible for employee interviewing and hiring, and employees of business establishments which offer potential work opportunities for retarded individuals. Most of these people can be reached through civic and fraternal organizations, such as the Jaycees, Lions Club, Elks Lodge, Masons, Knights of Columbus, Junior League, National Organization for Women, Kiwanis Club, Optimists Club, Rotary Club, National Alliance of Businesswomen, etc. Other extremely important groups are unions and churches. In most cases, a close working relationship with local unions and trade associations is advantageous, since these organizations can exert significant influence over employee wages and job descriptions.

The information presented to a group should be positive and convincing. There should not be any apologetic overtones when describing the vocational needs of retarded people or the types of jobs they can perform. The slide/tape presentation, "A Refreshing Alternative," and the manual, **Discussion Guide for the Slide Program: A Refreshing Alternative,** can help the speaker deliver an appealing and interesting program in a relatively short period of time. If the slide show is used, the recommended procedure is to briefly introduce the audiovisual, as suggested in the manual, and follow up with a question and answer session. This provides an opportunity to respond to the audience's questions, concerns or need for additional information.

Approaching individual employers. Most of the information presented to community groups is also suitable for individual employers. The information given will depend upon how much time an employer offers, his receptiveness toward the idea of hiring a retarded worker and the availability of a candidate for an actual job opening. "Selling" the work capabilities of retarded persons to the individual employer requires as much, if not more, preparation and skill than speaking engagements. The Committee members involved in this aspect of job development must relate effectively to employers. Specific information and suggestions for this activity are presented in the section, "Guidelines for Approaching Prospective Employers," beginning on page 16.

When identifying prospective businesses and employers, it may seem logical to first establish the types of jobs that retarded people can do (e.g., those which are repetitive and simple) and then attempt to find them in the community. The outcome of this approach can unnecessarily restrict job possibilities. Instead, **all** businesses should be surveyed for existing or potential job openings.

Using the media. The Employment Committee should aggressively solicit the interest, cooperation and involvement of the public media, including radio, television and newspapers, to promote the work capabilities of retarded individuals.

Since radio and television stations are required by law to devote a significant portion of their air time for free public service announcements and programs, the Committee should take advantage of this opportunity. Brief spot announcements, guest talk shows and special programs are ways to use radio and television. The ARC national headquarters offers on a loan basis two thirty-second television spots which encourage employers to hire mentally retarded workers and a 19 1/2-minute film, "The Hidden Resource," which provides an excellent overview of the work capabilities of retarded persons and the benefits they offer to employers. This movie can be shown on local television. There is also the possibility that some television stations may be interested in producing a special documentary focusing on local needs and conditions.

Newspapers can be very helpful in presenting general information or highlighting the vocational activities of individual retarded workers. A member of the Committee can provide a newspaper reporter with the background information for a story and make arrangements for a convenient meeting between the newspaper staff member and the persons to be interviewed.

Working with the Chamber **of** Commerce. The Committee should have ongoing communication with the Chamber of Commerce. This organization is familiar with the needs and characteristics of the business community and is generally aware of plans to establish new businesses. The Chamber of Commerce should be encouraged to actively participate in the Committee's promotional activities (e.g., to distribute information developed by the Committee). At the very least, it should show awareness of and support for the Committee's efforts to contact employers.

Implementing job fairs. The Committee can organize job fairs in which prospective employers, mentally retarded students and trainees, vocational training staff and job placement personnel are brought together. This kind of event offers employers an opportunity to present their employment needs and job requirements. In the process, employers can become acquainted with mentally retarded individuals and learn about their job skills and interests. Students in public schools and trainees in sheltered workshops are generally the appropriate audiences for this activity. A job fair can take place in any public facility (e.g., a school or church) which offers enough space for the employers to set up booths or interviewing areas. When planning a job fair, the Committee may want to ask the Mayor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, the Chamber of Commerce, civic and fraternal groups, or vocational training and job placement agencies to help in contacting and inviting prospective employers.

Promoting the Efforts of Others

The Committee can enhance the job development and placement efforts of other groups and agencies by establishing direct lines of communication with representatives of all local vocational training and job placement programs. Once contact has been made, the Committee can find out how it can support these programs.

It is extremely important that the Committee coordinate all of its activities with any other programs having similar goals. For example, before approaching a prospective employer, it is imperative that the Committee find out if he has already been contacted by other agencies promoting the employment of retarded workers. If so, the Committee could be competing with another agency and possibly making the employer feel hounded. Similarly, the Committee should advise appropriate agencies or programs when contacts are made by Committee members.

A high degree of coordination is beneficial to everyone. One way of achieving adequate communication and cooperation is to routinely involve other agency and program staff in Committee meetings.

Conducting Employer Recognition Programs

Participation in the ARC Employer of the Year awards program is an excellent way to create employer interest and reward those who have employed retarded workers. This awards program can generate a great deal of publicity, since employers nominated at the local level can be entered in the state and national ARC competition. National winners are selected from private and governmental sectors. The national winners are awarded a plaque and recognized through the Association's major publications and selected professional journals and publications. All nominees receive recognition awards from the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped and the ARC National Headquarters, co-sponsors of the program. The Committee can create publicity by presenting the awards at local meetings of civic or fraternal groups or at the ARC state convention. The necessary instructions and forms for nominating employers for this competition are available from the ARC'S National On-the-Job Training Project (see Appendix A for the address).

Another promotional activity is active participation in the National Employ the Handicapped Week, which occurs each year during the first full week of October. Guidelines for participation and publicity materials are available from the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C. 20210.

Supporting Legislation

ARC state offices and the ARC On-the-Job Training Project national headquarters and field personnel are excellent sources of information on relevant legislative activities. The Committee should recommend legislation to the ARC state or national office, as well as support any that is pending which would benefit retarded workers. In most states, the ARC has a state level legislative committee which can provide assistance and guidance.

Orienting Parents

The Committee's work will be much easier if it has the support of parents. Special orientation sessions should be conducted for the ARC's membership and other parents. The slide/tape presentation, "A Refreshing Alternative," can be used as a training tool and serve as a basis for discussion. The purpose of such meetings should be to explain what the Committee's goals are and how parents can help. Some will be apprehensive about their son's or daughter's employment because it connotes risk and some degree of independence from the family.

Some possible concerns parents may have about a retarded family member becoming employed include:

- Loss of benefits. Some parents may perceive employment as a threat to established benefits and financial assistance (e.g., Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income). It is true that federal medical insurance and financial assistance can be lost if a retarded person begins earning a salary beyond the federal cut-off level. However, parents need to know that these benefits can be reinstated if the family member is not successful in his attempt to work. It is also possible that federal medical benefits can be replaced by an employee group insurance plan.
- Vulnerability. Another common fear is that the retarded family member may be abused and exploited at work. There is always some risk involved in seeking greater independence. However, necessary risks can be minimized if the Employment Committee and job placement agency personnel provide adequate follow-up after locating a job for a retarded individual.

  In some situations, it may be advisable to assign a personal advocate to a retarded employee.

Coordinating Committee Efforts

Since the Committee can be involved in a number of activities, coordination is critical, especially if other programs or agencies with similar functions exist in the community. A chairperson should be appointed to give members assignments and coordinate their activities, inform other job development and placement agencies of the Committee's actions, and serve as a liaison to the ARC Board of Directors.

The chairperson should ensure that the members' abilities and interests are compatible with their Committee assignments. Some may be excellent speakers, while others are more effective in working with media personnel. At first, the chairperson may only have the individual member's opinion about what he or she can do best. Some members may have to try several different areas of Committee work before they find the one most suitable for them.

There are several ways in which the chairperson can coordinate Committee activities.

- Telephone contacts — members can routinely call the chairperson to discuss progress or problems.
- Personal contact — the chairperson can meet with Committee members individually to discuss unexpected problems, or to evaluate and possibly change a specific plan or activity.
- Written reports — upon the completion of an assignment (e.g., contacting an employer or speaking to a civic group) a Committee member can submit a brief written report to the chairperson, describing what has been accomplished and any problems that were encountered.
- Committee meetings — the Committee as a whole should meet regularly to review progress, develop plans for activities, assign

members to tasks and seek solutions to problems. At first, the Committee should meet on a weekly basis. After a few weeks, or when the Committee members begin to understand and have confidence in what they are supposed to do, meetings may only be necessary every two or three weeks.

As mentioned earlier, it is critical that all job development and placement efforts be highly coordinated with other concerned professionals and agencies to prevent duplication and unnecessary competition. Representatives of other vocationally oriented groups should be advised of the Committee's planned activities well in advance of their implementation. They should also be informed of changes in plans and activities. The easiest way to keep them informed is to have them attend the regular Committee meetings. Telephone or personal contacts should be used as backup strategies to apprise those who cannot come to certain meetings.

Another means of communication could be a periodic (e.g., monthly) newsletter; however, this approach is time consuming and expensive. It is also quite difficult to include all of the information necessary to fully advise the reader of plans or events. It is important that regardless of how the representatives are reached on a regular basis that other types of ongoing communication be established (e.g., telephone, letters, face-to-face meetings).

The ARC staff and Board of Directors should be kept fully informed of the Committee's plans and activities. Any change in major goals and objectives should be approved by the Board. The chairperson should be represented at general Board meetings and should submit monthly activity reports and an annual report to the Association's President.

Seeking Assistance for Problems

Occasionally, Committee members will encounter problems which require outside help to solve. To handle such situations, the Committee should compile a listing of all vocationally related activities, programs and agencies which are accessible to the community and describe the basic functions or services of each. Usually, several resources can offer assistance. Following are some examples:

Resource	Service
ARC local unit	Counselling, information and referral, leisure time activities
Local school program	Vocational evaluation and training, job placement, continuing education
Local rehabilitation agency	Medical, psychological and vocational evaluation, job placement, counselling, special equipment for worker
Sheltered workshop(s)	Work experience, job training and placement, counselling, leisure time activities
Regional ARC On-the-Job Training Project	Information and materials for job development and public education, training stipends, technical assistance for local efforts
State employment service	Information on job openings, employment statistics
Mayor's and/or Governor's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped	Information and materials for job development and public education
Department of Labor-Employment Standards Administration/Wage and Hour	Advice and materials on minimum wage laws, guidelines for industrial wages, investigation of wage problems

Guidelines for Approaching Prospective Employers

One of the most important functions of the Committee should be to meet with individual employers and persuade them to hire retarded workers. This kind of meeting requires much skill, knowledge and preparation on the part of the Committee members.

Preparation for a Contact

Before contacting a particular employer, the Committee member should learn as much as possible about the employer's business. How many employees work there and what do they do? What skills are required by the various jobs? Are there any work areas with a high rate of employee turnover? What is the employer like? This information can be gathered from various sources, including other employers who are familiar with the business in question, the Chamber of Commerce or an ARC member who is knowledgeable about the firm.

In some cases, it will not be possible to find out very much about an employer or his business. When this happens, the Committee member should contact the prospective employer via telephone or letter and ask to visit his business to learn about its operations and needs. This is not as effective as the previous method because the Committee member is forced to enter a situation "cold." As a result, the employer may be annoyed by the amount of time required to orient the volunteer.

The Initial Contact

The objective of the initial contact is to make an appointment with the employer. Several approaches may be used, some being more desirable and effective than others.

Introductory letter. In some cases, it may be desirable to send a letter to the prospective employer explaining the purpose and intent of the proposed visit. Specific arrangements for a meeting can be made through a follow-up letter or phone call. Unfortunately, the introductory letter can create a problem, since the employer is alerted to what the Committee member wants and may refuse further contact.

A slightly different strategy is to send a letter to prospective employers that states the Committee's purpose and activities and lists the general benefits of hiring retarded workers. No request is made to meet with the employer. This more indirect approach is less effective because it makes follow-up the responsibility of the employer. A business reply card can be included, but the response rate is not very good compared to the expense.

Telephone contact. A telephone contact is usually the follow-up to an introductory letter. The caller should be prepared (i.e., know exactly how the request will be phrased), brief (i.e., limit the conversation to an introduction, a statement of purpose and a request for an appointment on a specific day and time) and persuasive (the tone of the message should be firm, confident and non-defensive). If an employer voices fears or objections about hiring a retarded person, he should be encouraged to discuss these concerns during a person-to-person meeting. However, if the employer insists on a discussion of his concerns over the phone, the caller should respond to his questions in a diplomatic and tactful manner, and avoid being argumentative.

Referrals. The employer will usually be more agreeable to making an appointment if he knows that the contact was recommended by someone he knows. The most desirable referral is one which originates from a fellow businessperson who employs retarded workers. A referral can be used with any of the approaches discussed previously.

The Initial Meeting

The first meeting with a prospective employer should convince him that there are many benefits to be gained from hiring retarded individuals, that a retarded worker would be an asset in his business and that he should seriously consider employing one. If the meeting is successful, it is likely that arrangements can be made immediately or in the near future for the employer to interview a work-ready person. The following are guidelines for making that first meeting a success.

Be prepared. Unless the employer is very amenable to the idea of hiring a retarded person, the Committee member is at an extreme disadvantage if little is known about the employer and his business before a meeting occurs. (Important information to know about an employer and his business is discussed on page 16.)

Respect the employer's time. Employers are busy people. They are interested in income, productivity and efficiency in relation to their business. Unless the prospective employer indicates an interest in learning about the general causes and effects of mental retardation, the Committee member should only briefly discuss this subject. Generally, an employer is more interested in a potential employee's capabilities rather than his deficiencies.

Stress the benefits. Never approach an employer with the idea that he will hire a retarded person for altruistic reasons. An employer may be a very charitable person, but he would be foolish to operate his business like a charity. Mentally retarded people have proven themselves as capable and desirable employees. There is no need to be apologetic for the label they bear. Points to be stressed are:

- When a task is mastered, the retarded worker performs as well as a nonretarded worker in a similar job.
- The attendance record for retarded workers is generally better than average.
- The retarded employee usually uses less sick time than the average worker.
- The accident rate for retarded workers is less than that of average employees in the same job.

- Retarded people are not usually job hoppers; they tend to stay with an employer much longer than nonhandicapped workers performing in similar jobs.
- There are special tax benefits available to employers who hire handicapped people. (The volunteer can provide the employer information about this benefit by obtaining copies of IRS Form #5884 from the local Internal Revenue Office.)

Use common terminology. Simple language familiar to the employer should be used to describe retarded workers and their skills. Professional jargon should be avoided. For example, terms such as "EMR," "adaptive behavior," "self-help," "cultural-familial," "congenital," "receptive language," "severe, moderate or mild retardation," "half-way house," "dyslexia," etc. mean little to people outside the field of mental retardation. Reference should not even be made to jargon; most employers will not be impressed by or interested in an unnecessary display of the member's vocabulary.

A retarded person should be described as one who has less than average intelligence and requires a little more time than most people to learn something new. His strengths should be presented before any weaknesses are discussed. Problems or deficiencies which do not relate to the work situation should not be mentioned. A greater number of negative than positive comments will usually add up to a flat "no" from the employer.

Be prepared for objections. Most employers have some reservations about hiring retarded workers. Resistance is expected because myths and misconceptions about retarded people are so prevalent in our culture. Most major objections of employers and some suggested responses are presented below:

Objection: Retarded employees might hurt the public relations of my business.

Response: Many retarded people work directly with the public and negative reactions seldom occur. For example, some of the country's largest businesses, such as Marriott and Host International Hotels and Dobbs House restaurants, employ retarded workers in positions requiring close interaction with the public. If objections to your hiring practices are made, you could indicate that retarded people are not seeking a special privilege or favor. They simply want an opportunity to become active, self-respecting, self-supporting members of society. They deserve the same chance as their fellow citizens, and this is denied when they are refused employment.

Objection: If retarded people are slow, then they will require too much time for training and supervision.

Response: The mentally retarded worker will require some additional time for training. However, it should involve little more than what is required for any new employee. An employer can receive reimbursement for a portion of the retarded worker's salary during training through the ARC On-the-Job Training Project. This can help offset the additional training costs. Once a mentally retarded worker learns a new task, he requires no more supervision than other employees.

Objection: I can't afford to hire someone who will be sick frequently and absent from work.

Response: Many people associate mental retardation with physical illness. However, the condition has no relationship with health problems for the majority of retarded people. In fact, retarded workers normally use less sick leave than the average employee.

Objection: Each of my employees carries his own load, so paying minimum wage to someone who will work less than others earning the same amount would cause problems.

Response: The work records for most retarded workers indicate that they perform as well as other employees in similar jobs. The retarded worker will probably still be with the employer when the others are gone.

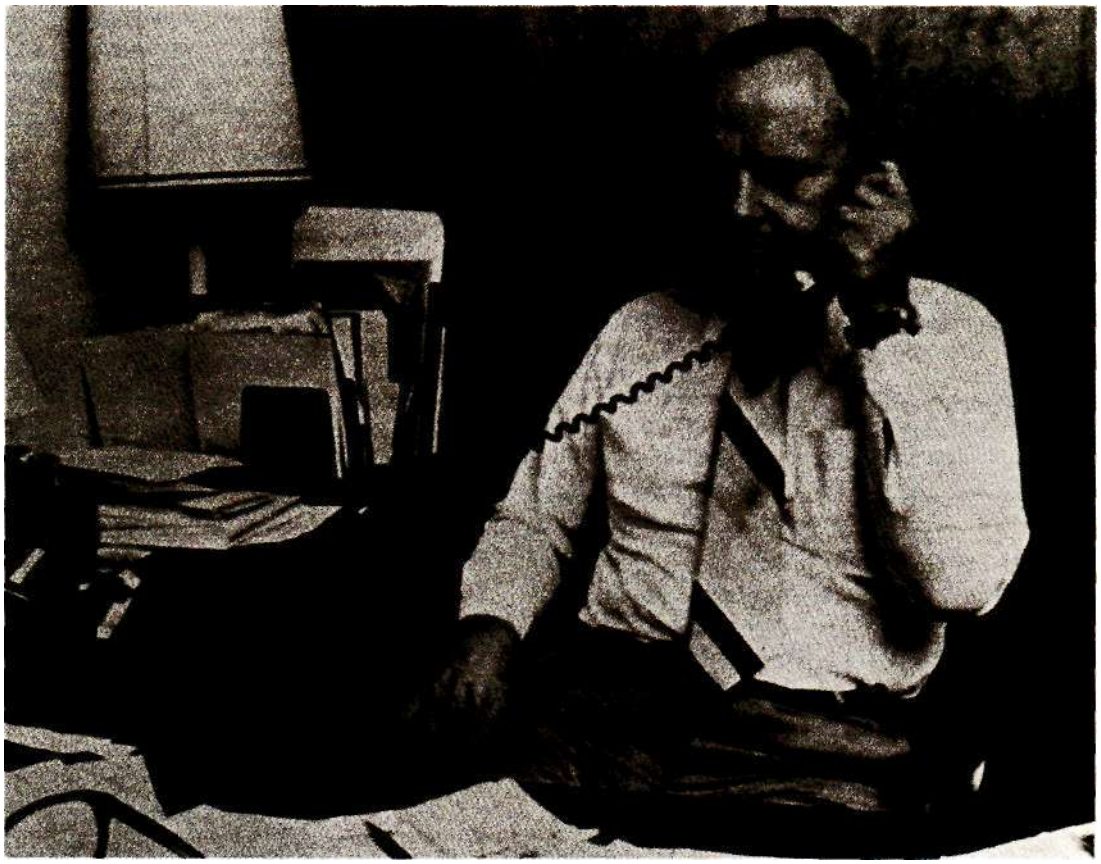
Objection: **I** can't hire someone who is accident prone; my insurance costs will go up.

Response: The accident rate for retarded workers is less than that for non-handicapped employees performing the same job. There are also no provisions in workmen's compensation insurance policies or rates which would penalize an employer for hiring a retarded person. Insurance rates are based on the overall number of accidents which have occurred in a business.

Objection: I think I hired a retarded person once. He didn't work out. I wouldn't want another person like him!

Response: Like a lot of other people, some mentally retarded individuals will not work out in a job if their skills and training are not matched with those required for the position. They may also fail if they are not given adequate on-the-job training. If the employer is willing to hire a retarded person, the Committee will work with him to help prevent problems.

A prospective employer's objections can be further refuted by letters of support from businessmen and women who employ retarded workers. Copies of such letters should be available during the initial meeting with the employer. He can also be encouraged to call other employers and discuss any concerns he may have.



Arranging a Job Interview

When an employer is interested in interviewing a retarded person, the Employment Committee member should make an appointment for the interview and ask the employer what information will be needed from the applicant. If possible, the Committee member should obtain an application form which the retarded person can complete before the interview.

If the Committee member is working jointly with a placement agency, the coordination of activities should begin immediately. He should find out if the placement personnel would prefer to make the appointment with the employer themselves. In addition, the member should tell them any relevant information he has learned while making contact with the employer, including concerns the employer has expressed about hiring retarded workers. It may be desirable for the Committee member to accompany the placement specialist and the retarded worker to the interview for introduction purposes.

When working directly with a retarded individual, the Committee should do as much as possible to prepare him for the interview (e.g., advising him on apparel and appearance, reviewing the types of information he might be asked during the interview and offering emotional support). The retarded person should be asked if the Committee member's presence during the interview is desired.

Avoiding Common Problems and Mistakes in Creating Job Opportunities

There are several precautions which should be made when creating employment opportunities for retarded individuals. Ignoring these potential problems can result in job failure and/or employer dissatisfaction.

Overlooking necessary coordination. If the Committee fails to coordinate its activities with those of other agencies and programs, all job development efforts can be stifled. Prospective employers can become resistant if they are contacted by too many different people about the same subject.

Ignoring extreme resistance. In most cases, it is unwise to try forcing a retarded worker on an unwilling employer. The noncooperative employer will be looking for problems and will usually find cause for firing the retarded employee as soon as possible. His convictions about the undesirableness of retarded people will be confirmed.

Overselling the client. It may be tempting to present the hiring of retarded workers as the solution to all of an employer's management and production problems. However, the interests of employers and retarded people will best be served if honest sales approaches are used by volunteers. Realistic expectations concerning retarded persons' intellectual capabilities and work skills should be presented to prospective employers. When retarded workers fail to perform as the employer believes they should, the result is disappointment for both parties. The chances for employment of other retarded workers in the same business may be permanently lost. In addition, the unhappy employer could become a vocal opponent of the Committee's efforts.

Placing those who are not job-ready. Readiness for competitive employment is a critical requirement for job success. If a person is not ready for work, training time will be excessive and the lack of positive attitudes and basic skills (e.g., promptness, desire to complete tasks, listening to instructions and personal hygiene) will probably cause the employee to lose the job.

Lack of follow-up. The involvement of placement personnel should not end when a retarded person is hired for a position. Unidentified or uncorrected problems occurring on the job (e.g., transportation) or during off-hours (e.g., adjustment to new social schedules or family resistance) can seriously interfere with job adjustment and success.

Transportation problems. The availability of transportation is an important factor to consider when developing a specific employment opportunity. The retarded person must have a reliable means of getting to work on time. In areas where there is no public transportation, the problem becomes even more critical.

Exercising the Normalization Principle

Certainly, most people need assistance when seeking employment. The Committee can be very helpful to retarded individuals in this way. However. members must respect the retarded person's dignity and self-esteem when developing jobs or seeking placements on his behalf. Whenever possible, retarded individuals should be encouraged to exercise independence, make their own decisions and have a responsible attitude about any job openings made known to them. It is counterproductive to the retarded- person's growth and development to do things for him that he is capable of doing himself.

Limitations of a Volunteer's Role

Volunteers should think of themselves as friends and informal advocates of mentally retarded individuals. However, it is important for volunteers to remember that they are part of a team, which includes the professionals working with the retarded workers. Coordination of the team's activities as well as mutual respect among members is critical. Only when the team works together can employment opportunities and successful placement be realized.

Assisting Mentally Retarded People In The Job Adjustment Process

Since the amount and quality of vocational preparation for mentally retarded people vary greatly, assistance in job adjustment can be critically important for some retarded workers. Committee members can be very helpful in this area, as long as their efforts are closely coordinated with those of any placement agencies involved.

Assessing Job Adjustment

As soon as a mentally retarded person has been hired or immediately after, a Committee member may wish to ask the employer's permission to help the new employee adapt to the job. The employer should fully understand that the volunteer's involvement will be constructive and directed toward helping the mentally retarded worker with unusual adjustment problems. It should be emphasized that the volunteer will not be making any evaluation of the employer or co-workers. The retarded employee's permission should also be obtained. If both the employer and the retarded worker accept the volunteer's offer to help, a reasonable schedule should be established for visiting the place of employment (e.g., once a week). When unusual adjustment problems arise, the Committee member should occasionally counsel the mentally retarded person after work.

When evaluating job adjustment, the member will need information from the employee and employer.

Adequacy of work skills. The employer should be **asked if** the retarded person has successfully **learned the** skills required for the job. **If** not, the **Committee** member needs to determine why. Has **the employee** received on-the-job training? **Is** the **employee able to** do the tasks required? If the training has been inadequate, the member can suggest alternative ways to teach the job skills (e.g., structuring the activity or giving very specific instructions).

If the mentally retarded person's capabilities have been mismatched with the job, the members should refer the problem to a vocational rehabilitation specialist or job placement staff person. This suggestion applies to any other serious adjustment problems that might cause the retarded employee to lose his job. If there is any question about the need for professional help, job placement or vocational counselling personnel should be consulted.

When evaluating an employee's attitude about his work, input should be obtained from both him and his employer. Following are some of the questions that should be asked:

- How does the worker respond to instructions?
- How does he approach a work task?
- How does he relate to co-workers?
- How does he use his time?
- What are the employee's feelings about his job?

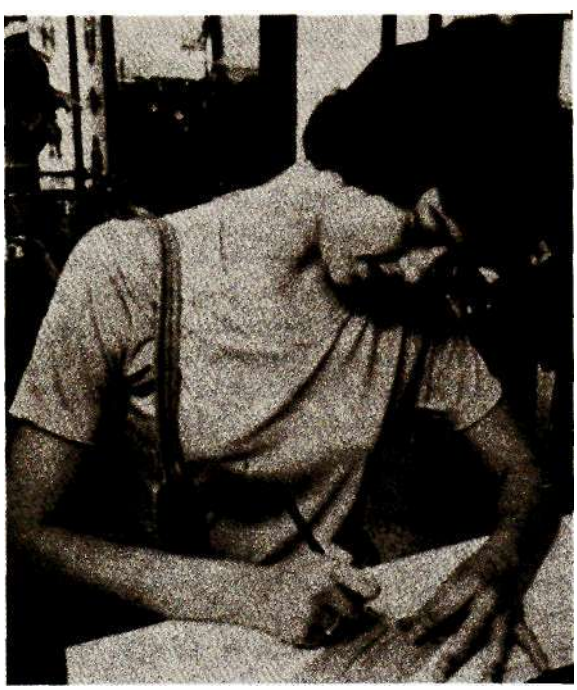
If the Committee member discovers any problems developing, he should discuss it with the employee, the employer or both. The objective of this discussion is to help the worker understand what he is doing to possibly jeopardize his job and to assist the employer in finding ways to correct undesirable attitudes or behaviors the employee may have. The Committee member should make sure that the employee's good qualities are also noticed and rewarded in discussions. It is easy to forget the positive things a person is doing, when emphasis is only placed on problems.

Assisting in After Work Activities

The mentally retarded person who is beginning his first job will probably experience difficulty in developing new and appropriate leisure time and social activities. Most unemployed mentally retarded people participate in social and leisure time pursuits during the daytime. When they begin working, these activities may be severely disrupted, if not completely eliminated. A retarded person should learn new constructive ways to spend his time after work. Otherwise, inactivity and isolation can cause boredom, depression or anti-social behavior which can negatively affect the retarded individual's attitudes about work and other aspects of his life. The volunteer can help by learning whether or not the employee is involved in any activities after work. If he isn't happy about how he is spending his leisure time, the Committee member should find out what interests the employee. With this information, suggestions can be made as to where the retarded person can go and do things during the evenings and weekends.

A citizen advocate can be very helpful to a mentally retarded person who is having difficulty adjusting to his new job and leisure time. Citizen advocates are trained volunteers who assist mentally retarded individuals in coping with day-to-day problems, living in the community, and using available local resources and services. The citizen advocacy approach is usually effective because it is on a one-to-one basis and is tailored to the needs of the individual. Due to its time requirements, volunteers for this approach should be recruited outside the Employment Committee. Complete information on the citizen advocacy concept and program is available from the ARC national headquarters.

Efforts to establish new social and leisure time activities should be discussed with others who are involved with the mentally retarded individual (e.g., vocational counsellors, job placement personnel, parents, advocates and adult education teachers). The involvement of others will help the retarded person adjust to a new lifestyle, including work.

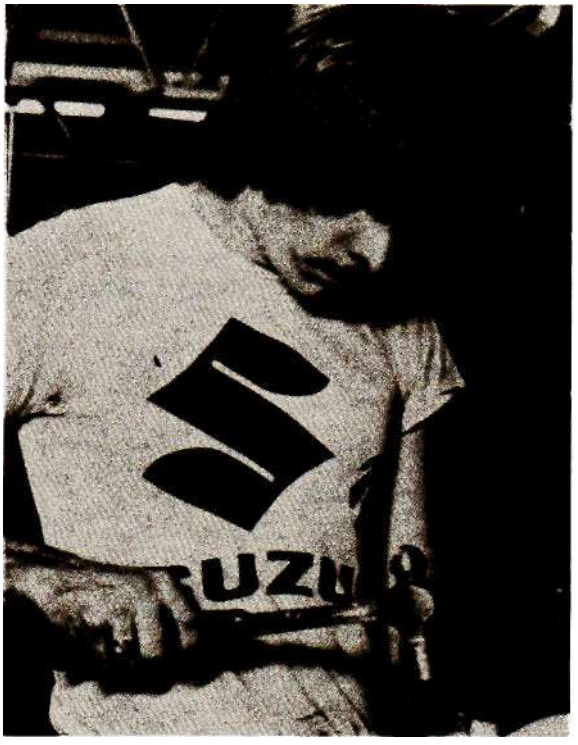


Accepting The Challenge

Actively promoting the employment capabilities of mentally retarded citizens and creating new job opportunities for them are new and exciting roles for many volunteers. As parents and advocates, ARC members are in a unique position to assume these responsibilities.

While professionals are doing much to address the employment needs of mentally retarded men and women, their caseloads are usually quite large and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to provide the personalized services which are needed. The volunteer members of the Association thus represent a potent source of "person power" that can be mobilized to supplement and enhance the work of vocational rehabilitation specialists. Without volunteer participation, there is every reason to believe that the employment needs of many mentally retarded persons will not be appropriately met in the future.

The ARC has a long and successful history of promoting the welfare of mentally retarded individuals, and in helping them to achieve their rightful place in society. The information presented on the preceding pages is intended to assist the Association's volunteers in meeting the challenge of "making job opportunities for mentally retarded people a reality."



Appendix A

The following is a listing of the On-the-Job Training Project Offices and the respective states which they serve:

National Project Office

National Project Director
On-the-Job Training Project
Association for Retarded Citizens
National Headquarters
P. O. Box 6109
Arlington, Texas 76011
(817)261-4961

Regional Project Offices

Location	States served
Field Coordinator 5602 Baltimore National Pike Suite 307 Baltimore, Maryland 21228 (301) 744-0257	Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia
Field Coordinator P. O. Box 6109 Arlington, Texas 76011 (817)261-4961	Texas, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma
Field Coordinator 1621 S. University Drive Suite 202 Fargo, North Dakota 58102 (701) 235-4479	Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota
Field Coordinator 377 Elliott St. Newton Upper Falls, MA 02164 (617)964-4080	Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire
Field Coordinator 99 Bayard Street New Brunswick, N.J. 08901 (201) 246-2525	Connecticut, New Jersey, Rhode Island
Field Coordinator 401 South Third Street Suite 312 Las Vegas, Nevada 89101 (702) 384-5988	Nevada, California, Arizona, Utah
Field Coordinator 2815 Clearview Place Suite 500 Atlanta, Georgia 30340 (404) 458-8024	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee
Field Coordinator Woodland Hills Building 3000 Old Canton Road Suite 585 Jackson, Mississippi 39216 (601)362-7912	Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri
Field Coordinator 2700 Laura Lane Middleton, Wisconsin 53562 (608)831-1151	Illinois, Indiana, Ohio
Field Coordinator 5707 Lacey Boulevard Suite 109 Lacey, Washington 98503 (206) 491-3141	Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming
Field Coordinator 827 E. Main Street Suite 1803 Richmond, Virginia 23219 (804) 649-9650	Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia
Field Coordinator 2700 Laura Lane Middleton, Wisconsin 53562 (608)831-1151	Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin

Resources

Association for Retarded Citizens. **Give An Opportunity-Gain An Asset.** ARC National Headquarters, Arlington, Texas, 1974.

Association for Retarded Citizens. **Guidelines for State and Local Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Committees.** ARC National Headquarters, Arlington, Texas, 1974.

Association for Retarded Citizens. **Vocational and Life Skills.** ARC National Headquarters, Arlington, Texas, 1975.

Association for Retarded Citizens. **Working Together With Mentally Retarded Employees.** ARC National Headquarters, Arlington, Texas, 1976.

Beebe, Patricia; Ridgely, Mary and **Kurth,** Merlen. **A Model to Facilitate Direct Provision of Services Among the Seven Generic Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Agencies.** DHEW Grant Project (Number 56-P-25598): Association for Retarded Citizens in Wisconsin, Middleton, Wisconsin, 1978.

Nelson, Nathan. **Workshops for the Handicapped in the United States: An Historical and Developmental Perspective.** Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1971.