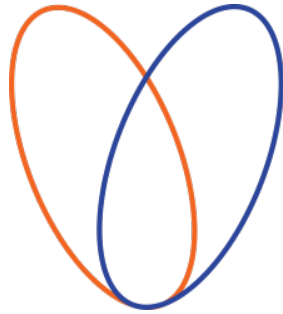




**COVID-19 Update      September 18, 2020**



Direct Support Professional  
**RECOGNITION WEEK**



**A Message from Director Kathryn Power**



As Direct Support Professional Recognition Week comes to an end, I want to thank the thousands of hard-working DSPs in Rhode Island.

The RI Division of Developmental Disabilities oversees more than 30 agencies and thousands of hardworking and deeply committed DSPs. DSPs are tireless workers who serve as coaches, mentors, companions, partners, and advocates. They are often the first to create and find pathways and opportunities, connect individuals to their communities and are contributing to the transformative progress of the system of supports for individuals with I/DD.

At BHDDH, we have new expectations and standards for person-centered practice that are reflected in our regulations. We have invested in employment and training, launched a customized case management system, and closed the doors to all sheltered workshops in RI. We have opened new doors through our strengthened community partnerships. At the heart of these investments are the individuals we support and the vital workforce of our direct support professionals.

Rhode Island DSPs represent a skilled workforce who know when to lead, when to follow, when to fade back and when to let go. It is this talent that promotes the potential and abilities of all Rhode Islanders to be valued, independent and contributing members of their communities.

We are indebted to all DSPs for your hard work, commitment, care and graciousness – thank you for all you do!

Kathryn Power  
Director



## Reopening Decision Tool for Individuals and Families

Advocates in Action (AinA) has been working with BHDDH to develop a helpful guide to things to consider before returning to the community activities or work while COVID is still a concern.

Some people don't feel comfortable going back into the community for their job or day services just yet, and that's OK. At the same time, pretty much everyone misses their old routine in one way or another, so if you're thinking about returning to your community-based job or restarting your community-based services, you're not alone.

There are some things you need to know as you develop your plan to return to the community. Most importantly, you need to understand that the pandemic isn't over yet. While no one can say for sure, it looks like COVID will continue to be a health threat for a while. There isn't a vaccine yet that can prevent COVID, such as the shots we have for illnesses like measles or the seasonal flu. They also haven't found medicine to cure COVID, or help someone recover from it, like antibiotics can cure an infection.

All of this means that everyone needs to be extra careful and practice COVID safety precautions. We need to stay informed and use what we learn to make choices that are reasonable and safe going forward.

The guide is a tool to help individuals, families, and people in their circle of support decide how risky it may be to return to community-based activities. It will help people think about what kind of support they will need, and whether or not they will be able to get it.

We hope it will help people think about, and have some meaningful conversations, regarding reopening and whether or not all of the potential benefits outweigh the risks.

The guide can also be used to make a plan for how to stay safe. If someone decides that they are not ready and want to take it slow and stay at home, they can also make a plan for what they want and need to have in place before returning to community activities.

You can find the guide on the BHDDH website at <https://bhddh.ri.gov/covid/> or the AinA website at <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>.

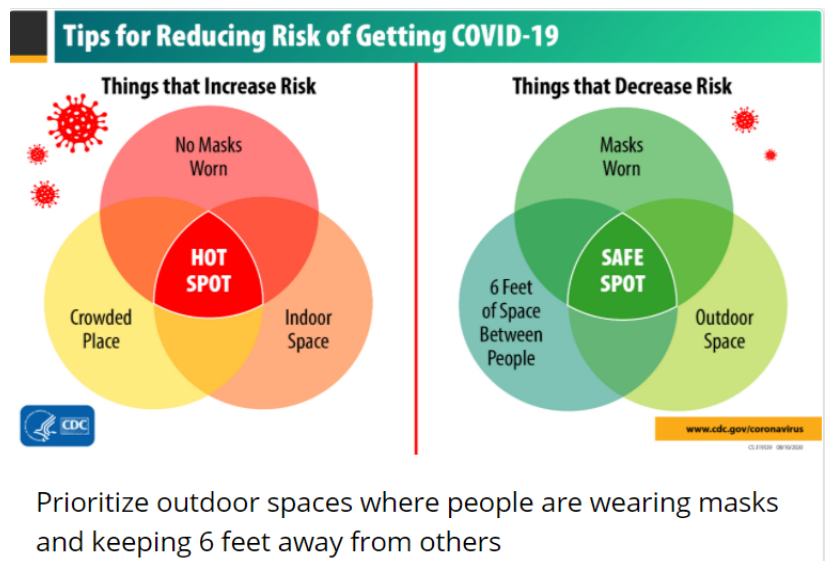
For other resources to help with your decision, see:

[CDC Deciding to Go Out](#)

[CDC Personal and Social Activities](#)

[CDC Returning to Work](#)

[CDC Daily Activities and Going Out](#)



Prioritize outdoor spaces where people are wearing masks and keeping 6 feet away from others

## Take it Outside RI



Since life's a little inside-out these days...

...we might as well make the best of it by moving our indoor activities to the outdoors. Fitness classes, dining, family activities, even business meetings can take place out in the fresh air. And bonus: recent research shows that we're 19 times more likely to catch COVID-19 when we're inside compared to when we're outside. So let's take it outside, Rhode Island.

For more information see: <https://reopeningri.com/take-it-outside>

## Welcome to the Voter Information Center

The Voter Information Center can be found at <https://vote.ri.gov/>. It contains a lot of user-friendly information about how to vote in Rhode Island. Below are some highlights for the upcoming election in November.



### **Why Be A Voter?**

The best public policy decisions are made when there is a diversity of opinions, perspectives and backgrounds at the policy-making table. Voting is fundamental to our representative democracy and your civic participation is critical to our success as a state.

### **Register to Vote**

Before you can vote, elections officials need to know a few things about you, such as your eligibility to vote and where you live. Registering in advance shows poll workers on Election Day that you are a qualified voter and ensures that you get to vote in all the elections and on ballot questions that affect you. If you are not registered to vote, you can register by mail, in-person, or online at the [Voter Information Center](#). You will need:

- Your Rhode Island DMV issued driver's license or State ID number
- Your name as it appears on your Rhode Island driver's license or State ID card
- Your date of birth

You must register by **October 4<sup>th</sup>** to vote in the November general election.



## Voting from Home with a Mail Ballot

Rhode Island voters who are unable, or prefer not, to go the polls on Election Day can vote by mail. Ballots can be mailed in or put in a voter drop box located throughout the State. Voters who are permanently disabled can submit an Application for a Permanent Mail Ballot to their local board of canvassers. This allows them to be designated to receive a mail ballot application for each election in their jurisdiction. You must submit a mail ballot application by **October 13<sup>th</sup>** to get a mail ballot for the November general election.



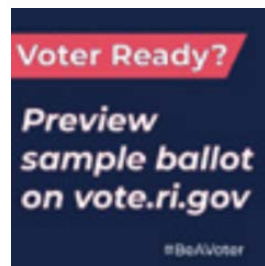
## Early Voting Period: How to Vote In-Person Before Election Day



In the 20 days leading up to Election Day, you can vote in person at your town hall during regular business hours. This is a great option if you are unable to vote at your usual polling place on Election Day, or if you have run out of time to request a mail ballot. Voting early in-person is very similar to voting at a polling place.

## What if I need assistance casting my vote?

You can request the assistance of a bipartisan pair of poll workers. Federal and state laws allow voters who are blind, disabled, or unable to read or write to bring a person of their choice into the voting booth. An affidavit must be completed.



## What is a sample ballot?

A sample ballot lists all the elections and candidates you can vote for, and has all the ballot questions for voters. You can view a sample ballot on the [Voter Information Center](#) so that you can take your time before voting to review the options, make sure you understand all the questions, and decide how you want to vote before you cast your ballot.

## Know Your Rights

Any attempt to interfere with your right to vote or to unduly influence your vote is a crime. It is a crime to try to make you vote a certain way by making threats or offering gifts.

You have a right to:

- Keep who you vote for a secret
- Vote free of harassment or intimidation
- Vote by mail

### Important Dates

General Election:	Tuesday, November 3
Voter Registration Deadline:	October 4
Mail Ballot Application Deadline:	October 13
General Election Early Voting Period:	Oct 14 – Nov 2

## September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month—a time to shed light on this highly taboo and stigmatized topic. Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or background. AAIDD has a recorded webinar on [Understanding and Preventing Suicide in People with IDD](#).

Different life experiences affect a person’s risk for suicide. For example, suicide risk is higher among people who have experienced violence, including child abuse, bullying, or sexual violence. Feelings of isolation, depression, anxiety, and other emotional or financial stresses are known to raise the risk for suicide. People may be more likely to experience these feelings during a crisis like a pandemic.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact the


**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**



1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

However, there are ways to protect against suicidal thoughts and behaviors. For example, support from family and community, or feeling connected, and having access to in-person or virtual counseling or therapy can help with suicidal thoughts and behavior, particularly during a crisis like the pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created a webpage for [coping with stress](#) in the difficult times resulting from COVID.



**What is suicide?**  
*Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die.  
A suicide attempt is when someone harms themselves with the intent to end their life, but they do not die as a result of their actions.*

### Coping With Stress

#### **Pandemics can be stressful**

The COVID pandemic may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a new disease and what could happen can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, can make people feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. However, these actions are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID. **Coping with stress in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.**

Stress during an infectious disease outbreak can cause the following:

- Fear and worry about your health and the health of your loved ones, your financial situation or job, or loss of support services you rely on.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems or mental health conditions.
- Increased use of tobacco, and/or alcohol and other substances.

#### **Take care of yourself and your community**

Taking care of your friends and your family can be a stress reliever, but it should be balanced with care for yourself. Helping others cope with their stress, such as by providing social support, can make your community stronger. During times of increased social distancing, people can still maintain social connections and care for their mental health. Phone calls or video chats can help you and your loved ones feel socially connected, less lonely, or isolated.

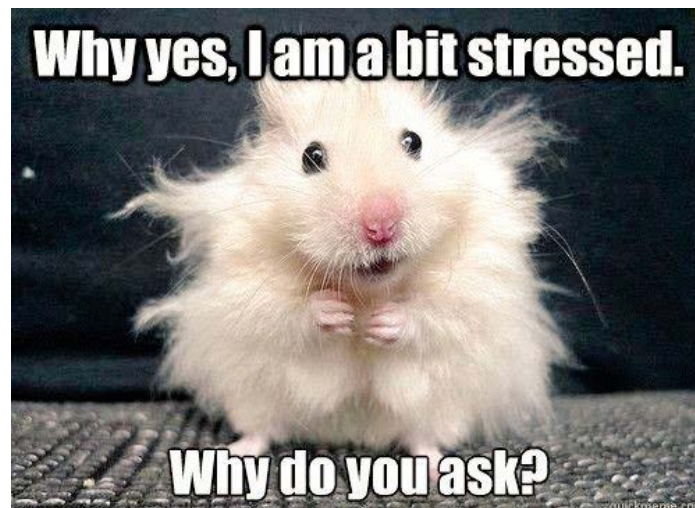
## Recovering from COVID or ending home isolation

It can be stressful to be separated from others if you have or were exposed to COVID. Each person ending a period of home isolation may feel differently about it. Emotional reactions may include:

- Mixed emotions, including relief.
- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Stress from the experience of having COVID and monitoring yourself or being monitored by others.
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have fears of getting the disease from you, even though you are cleared to be around others.
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal work or parenting duties while you had COVID.
- Worry about getting re-infected or sick again even though you've already had COVID.

### Healthy ways to cope with stress

- **Know [what to do if you are sick](#) and are concerned about COVID-19.** Contact a health professional before you start any self-treatment for COVID-19.
- **Know where and how to get treatment** and other support services and resources, including counseling or therapy (in person or through telehealth services).
- **Take care of your emotional health.** [Taking care of your emotional health](#) will help you think clearly and react to the urgent needs to protect yourself and your family.
- **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories**, including those on social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- **Take care of your body.**
  - Take deep breaths, stretch, or [meditate](#).
  - [Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals](#).
  - [Exercise regularly](#).
  - [Get plenty of sleep](#).
  - Avoid excessive [alcohol and drug use](#).
- **Make time to unwind.** Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- **Connect with your community- or faith-based organizations.** While social distancing measures are in place, consider connecting online, through social media, or by phone or mail.



## Silver Linings

### **At 39, disability activist Melissa Blake is modeling in her first runway show – at New York Fashion Week**

*Excerpted from article by Nara Schoenberg, Chicago Tribune*



*Melissa Blake is dressed in clothes by the Zappos Adaptive Line and is appearing in New York Fashion Week. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)*

As a teenager in the 1990s, Melissa Blake was interested in fashion. Unfortunately, fashion wasn't much interested in her.

Blake, who has a genetic bone and muscle disorder and stands a little under 4 feet tall, couldn't find jeans or dresses in her size. Paging through Glamour and Cosmopolitan magazines, she didn't see a single person who looked like her.

"That would have been a game-changer for me," said Blake, a freelance writer and disability activist. "When you're a teenager — disabled or not — you deal with issues of self-confidence and self-esteem. If I had seen someone who looked like me, I would have felt really seen."

Now, Blake, 39, is a fashion role model herself. This week she's appearing in the annual Runway of Dreams fashion show featuring clothes designed for people with disabilities. The show, while virtual this year, is part of the glitz and glamour of New

York Fashion Week. Blake was among 24 people worldwide who were chosen to model in Monday's show, [which can be seen on YouTube](#).

"Being able to put Melissa in arguably the biggest fashion event of the year just hit home how important it is to expand who consumers are in the fashion industry, or who should be on runways, or what we're really representing in the word model," said Runway of Dreams founder and CEO Mindy Scheier.

Blake has written for The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, as well as her teen favorites, Glamour and Cosmopolitan. She's also known for [a viral post on Twitter last year](#), in which she responded to trolls who criticized her appearance. Blake met the insults with cheerful defiance, posting multiple selfies. One of her posts got more than 300,000 likes, with fans calling Blake a goddess, a badass, and a powerful woman. One issued a "new super-hero alert," and another offered six emoji trophies with a fiery "Work it girl! YOU IZ FAB."

Blake responded similarly earlier this month, when parents on TikTok posted videos in which they pranked their kids by displaying images of disabled people and saying "this is your new teacher." Blake was among the disabled people mocked in the videos. "Every time I post a selfie or I share something about my life as a disabled woman, I feel like that is representation that is going to really combat this ableism," Blake told Boston NPR news station WBUR-FM.

The Runway of Dreams show is virtual this year, so Blake's sister filmed her riding her scooter on a quiet street, dressed in a graphic T-shirt, capris and an oversize maroon vest with a fluffy fur collar, all by Zappos Adaptive.

Often, when we think of access for disabled people, we think of buildings and employment, she said. But it's also important to have access to what's fun and enjoyable. "Fashion isn't going to solve all the world's problems," Blake said. "But I think when disabled people are included, it sends a message that we deserve a seat at the table in all aspects of life."

## **WEBINAR: Supporting Decision-Making: Assisting People to Make Better Decisions**

Date: October 22, 2020

Time: 4:00-4:45pm EST

Register for this webinar [here](#)

While Supported Decision-Making (SDM) has become increasingly recognized as an option, there remains much work to be done to foster the widespread use of SDM in the day to day lives of people with disabilities. This session will explore practical strategies for working directly with people who have disabilities to develop the skills and experience needed for decision-making. The presenters will identify and explore key concepts that professionals can use as guidance when they are assisting people to strengthen their decision-making abilities.

This webinar is presented by The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), an interdisciplinary organization of professionals and others concerned about intellectual and developmental disabilities. See more at <https://www.aidd.org/>.

### **COVID-19 Webinar Series**

#### **Exercise as a Human Right: Providing Inclusive Physical Fitness Opportunities to People with IDD During the Pandemic and Beyond**

September 29th, 2020 at 2 PM EDT

[REGISTER \[uichicago.webex.com\]](https://uichicago.webex.com)

The following past webinar recordings can be found at  
<https://www.healthmattersprogram.org/covid-19-webinar-series/>.

- Addressing Emotional Health Needs of People with IDD During a Pandemic: A Model Demonstration Project to Promote Engagement and Comfort During a Crisis
- Talking about COVID-19: Resources for People with IDD
- Impact of COVID-19 on Organizations Serving Individuals with IDD
- Preparing Your Employees for the Impact of COVID-19: Updates from Providers
- Communicating COVID-19 Updates to People with IDD, Caregivers, and Stakeholders
- Even During a Crisis, People with Disabilities have Rights
- Hospitalized People with IDD Need their Caregivers: They Aren't Visitors
- Shifting Services in Community-Based Organizations: Meeting the Needs of People with IDD
- Employment Resilience: People with IDD are Critical Frontline Workers
- Where's the Outrage: COVID-19 Response Now and Moving Forward
- Protecting Ourselves, Protecting Others Part 1: What to Wear at Work and Why
- Protecting Ourselves, Protecting Others Part 2: Caring for Someone Infected with COVID-19 in their Home

The COVID-19 Webinar Series is presented by the [HealthMatters Program \[healthmattersprogram.org\]](https://healthmattersprogram.org/), Department of Disability and Human Development, College of Applied Health Sciences, University of Illinois at Chicago through continued partnership with [Project SEARCH \[projectsearch.us\]](https://projectsearch.us) funded by the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Grant # 17CH03FA20 and [Aspire \[aspirechicago.com\]](https://aspirechicago.com)



## If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, BH Link is here for you

BH Link's mission is to ensure all Rhode Islanders experiencing mental health and substance use crises receive the appropriate services they need as quickly as possible in an environment that supports their recovery. Call 911 if there is risk of immediate danger. Visit the BH Link website at [www.bhlink.org](http://www.bhlink.org) or for confidential support and to get connected to care:

CALL (401) 414-LINK (5465)

If under 18 CALL: (855) KID(543)-LINK(5465)

Visit the 24-HOUR/7-DAY TRIAGE CENTER at 975 Waterman Avenue, East Providence, RI

## Stay Informed with Information on COVID-19

### Rhode Island Department of Health COVID-19 Resources

Hotline (401) 222-8022 or 211 after hours;

Email [RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov](mailto:RIDOH.COVID19Questions@health.ri.gov)

Website <https://health.ri.gov/covid/>

### Center for Disease Control COVID-19 Information

Website [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus)

Videos <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/videos.html>

*Includes a link to ASL videos*

### BHDDH Information on COVID-19's Impact on DD Services and the DD Community

Website [bhddh.ri.gov/COVID](http://bhddh.ri.gov/COVID)

### RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN)

Website <https://ripin.org/covid-19-resources/>

Call Center (401) 270-0101 or email [callcenter@ripin.org](mailto:callcenter@ripin.org)

### Advocates in Action – for videos and easy to read materials

Website <https://www.advocatesinaction.org/>

*Website offers BrowseAloud, which will read the website to you*

## Sign Up for Our Email List

If you aren't receiving email updates and newsletters from the Division, you can sign up on our website. From the main BHDDH page at [bhddh.ri.gov](http://bhddh.ri.gov), select **What's New**, then go to bottom and click on **DD Community Newsletter**. The link to sign up for the BHDDH Newsletter is directly below the title, as shown in the picture at right.

DD Community Newsletter

[SIGN UP FOR THE BHDDH NEWSLETTER](#)

## Contacting the Division

The department is working on a reduced workforce and therefore calls should not be placed directly to your social caseworker. DDD has put 24-hour phone coverage in place with a central business hour phone number and an on-call number for nights and weekends.

If you have a vital need, please call the numbers below. If you have any general questions or concerns, please email them if you can, in order to try to leave the phone lines free for those who need to call. We will do our best to address your questions directly or through future newsletters.

AM **M T W Th F** PM  
**401-462-3421**

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 4:00 PM

**WEEKDAYS DURING BUSINESS HOURS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**
- **QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR DD SERVICES**

During business hours  
 (Monday-Friday 8:30-4:00),  
 for questions or support  
**(401) 462-3421**  
 Para español, llame  
**(401) 462-3014**

PM **M T W Th F** PM  
**401-265-7461**

4:00 PM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

**AFTER HOURS ON WEEKDAYS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

For emerging or imminent care  
 related questions,  
 Mon - Fri 4pm-10pm and  
 weekends 8:30am-10pm  
**(401) 265-7461**

AM **SAT SUN** PM  
**401-265-7461**

8:30 AM → → → → → ← ← ← ← ← 10:00 PM

**ON WEEKENDS FOR:**

- **VITAL, NON-MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

Send general questions to the  
 AskDD email address. Please  
 do not email critical issues.  
[BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov](mailto:BHDDH.AskDD@bhddh.ri.gov)

**E-MAIL THE DIVISION**

**BHDDH.AskDD**  
**@BHDDH.RI.GOV**

HELP US KEEP THE PHONE LINES OPEN FOR  
 THOSE WHO ARE CALLING WITH A VITAL NEED!

**WHEN POSSIBLE, PLEASE SEND AN E-MAIL FOR:**

- **NON-CRITICAL CONCERNS** about Your Services and Supports
- **GENERAL QUESTIONS** about Your Services or the RI DD System

**911**

**FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES**  
**CALL 911**  
**RIGHT AWAY. DON'T WAIT!**

For medical or  
 healthcare related  
 emergencies, call  
 your Primary Care  
 Physician or 911

**CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR**

**CALL FOR:**

- **ROUTINE Healthcare Questions**
- **NON-EMERGENCY Medical Care**

**FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S ADVICE**  
**DON'T go to their office**  
**unless they tell you to!**

## Virtual Open House

### Learn more about the New Person-Centered Supported Employment Program (PCSEP) Projects

Four projects will use a customized employment approach to help individuals who have never been employed before find a job.

**Monday, September 21 at 3:00 PM**

Register here: [PCSEPP 3 Webinar Registration \[us02web.zoom.us\]](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91012020000)

*The Ingredients For Your*  
**Successful Employment**  
Looking Upwards, L.I.F.E. Inc., and West Bay RI



Seven Hills and Trudeau Center

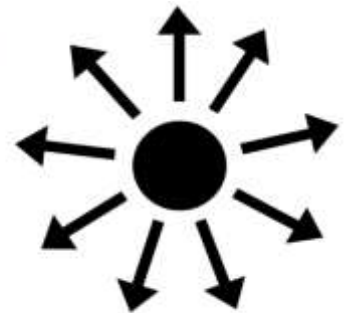
**Employment Matters**  
You Can Make It Work

**WORK TOWARDS YOUR DREAMS**

Perspectives, AccessPoint RI,  
and Trudeau Center

Customized  
Employment  
Options

BE THE CEO OF YOUR FUTURE



Work Inc. and Kaleidoscope

### What is Customized Employment?

“Customized employment” is a different approach to looking for a job. It focuses on identifying a person’s strengths and creating a profile that is used to target businesses where the job seeker’s unique characteristics and skills will be seen as assets. The question is not if the person can work, but where will the individual’s unique characteristics be valued?