Four years ago we had a dream. We wanted to do something big, something special for October which is Disability & Rehabilitation Employment Awareness Month. A number of local service providers came together to make a significant difference in the crushing unemployment rate for people with disabilities.

The idea we came up with was literally a DREAM. The first DREAM Job Fair was held at Beacon in 2011. We had 22 employers and over 450 job seekers at that first Job Fair. Reports showed that over 100 people with disabilities got hired after the event. This DREAM was becoming a reality.

The next year, there were four DREAM Job Fairs in Arizona, as other service providers around the State picked up on our idea. Last year there were seven job fairs! This year there will be eleven job fairs held (10 in Arizona and one in Texas)!

On October 8th, we held our 4th annual DREAM Job Fair in Tucson. It was by every measure the biggest and best one we’ve held. We had 55 employers and almost 500 job seekers!

We’re hoping that DREAM will continue to grow past Arizona. Maybe it will become National. We can DREAM, can’t we?
Every year, Beacon is evaluated, audited and examined by any number of agencies and entities who oversee rehabilitation services, labor practices, transportation and the overall administration health of our organization.

It is standard operating procedure for them and us to ensure that we are doing the work we are paid to do, following the best practices and policies in our daily work, and that we have no substantial weaknesses or failings in our operations. I would guess between five and ten such evaluations occur in an average year.

Beacon has just successfully completed our thirteenth CARF accreditation!

The process can be short and sweet, or long and labor intensive. Of course, you hope to never be found in violation of any laws or statutes, or even out of compliance with any policies or procedures that we are expected to have in place. Luckily, this is rarely the case.

However, these audits and evaluations are also opportunities to learn and get better at delivering services, measuring program impact, financial accounting or report filing to name just a few areas. The best way to avoid failures or problems is to make fixes part of your permanent regular operating procedures when they are identified. We try to use all of these as ways to get better, not just a test to pass and then go back to what we’ve always done.

Years ago, Beacon volunteered to go through our accreditation process with an organization called CARF (the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission.) It is not required that an organization like ours be formally accredited. It is also pretty expensive. However, we felt then (in 1980), and still feel, that CARF accreditation is the “gold standard” for rehabilitation programs.

I am very pleased to report that Beacon has just successfully completed our thirteenth CARF accreditation. For the 12th time in a row, we received the maximum 3-year accreditation — the most CARF gives.

When you go through the CARF Survey, besides the years of accreditation you receive (1 year means you have problem areas that need to be addressed; 3 years mean you successfully passed without any significant failure), the surveyors also can make recommendations. Those are potential problems they want to see addressed before the next survey comes around.

I am more than just a little pleased to report that for the first time in our 12 CARF Surveys, Beacon did not receive a single recommendation from our surveyors! I understand it is very rare to have zero recommendations, as it is something to be very proud of. This is a strong testament to our whole staff but, especially, our rehabilitation department for just an outstanding job.

For our clients and their families, for our employer-partners, and for our supporters, it is a very strong sign of Beacon’s efficiency, effectiveness, stability and service competence. I don’t want to brag, but a little credit where it’s due is good for everyone’s morale!
Victoria Novelli’s life has been a struggle from the very beginning. “Challenging” would be a word to describe her young life. So would “chaotic!” Victoria was born in June of 1994 with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome with cognitive delays. Her mother was unable to care for Victoria and was, eventually, adopted from Texas by a couple in Arizona. Suzanne and Richard Novelli moved to Southern Arizona with Victoria and their son who was also adopted. They settled in Oro Valley where Victoria eventually attended Ironwood Ridge High School.

At Ironwood, Victoria took Special Ed classes, and is very proud of the fact that she graduated on-time with her class. She is quite bright, but struggles with reading and math. Her goal is to go to college someday. But her parents felt the best thing for her now was to see if she could get a job.

Vocational Rehabilitation referred Victoria last September for Trial Work Experience. This involves an assessment process to evaluate the client’s skills in relation to being “employable,” such as attendance, grooming, following instructions and learning tasks and routines.

Victoria started working on rivet assembly in our main facility. She quickly was offered a “progressive move” to our in-house custodial crew. Besides keeping the Beacon facility looking its best, this is where clients learn cleaning skills, use of chemicals and proper techniques of the job. If they are successful on the Beacon crew, clients will be offered the chance to work on one of the many custodial crews working at businesses out in the community.

After another successful work trial, Victoria was offered the chance to work on the custodial crew at a new community worksite. This last April, Victoria began work at Biosphere 2 in Oracle, Arizona on the custodial and landscaping crew. With the move to the Biosphere crew, Victoria was also promoted from Trial Work to Work Adjustment. This meant that she was considered capable of regular employment at some point. It was now our job to smooth out any “rough edges” and help Victoria prepare for independent work.

The last step in Victoria’s program plan would be Job Development. This is where staff would help the client find and secure “competitive employment,” which means a regular job in the community. Even though Victoria was doing great and could clearly do the work at a “competitive” level, her family and staff were still concerned about her vulnerability. She was very social and a very trusting person. That isn’t always a good thing in what can be a dangerous world.

Her Program Manager, Wayne Bell, began looking for a job that was the best of both worlds.

This summer, Beacon had an opening on one of its custodial crews at the Federal Courthouse. The crew is made up of ex-clients who now have been hired as staff. They all make above minimum wage with benefits. And, even though they are full employees, not “clients” anymore, they still work under the Beacon umbrella as they have the safety and understanding of trained staff with the income and responsibility of real outside employment. Victoria started work at the courthouse on September 3rd.

The support and order of the courthouse crew has been a perfect fit for Victoria. Her Project Manager, Santiago Miranda, says that she is his “ray of sunshine” and a great worker. Her mother, Suzanne, says the structure Beacon provided Victoria has given her the confidence to take more responsibility for herself and to try new things. She talks about maybe trying to write a book. A courtroom thriller might be in order!
One of Beacon’s community worksites is a custodial contract to clean the largest office building in Tucson — the Evo A. DeConcini Courthouse. That contract is part of the AbilityOne program through SourceAmerica — a national nonprofit that provides a link between workers with disabilities and jobs for the Federal Government. These jobs are set up with a network of over 600 community-based nonprofits similar to Beacon.

The Judges at the U.S. District Court wanted to do something to recognize the Beacon clients and staff who have been cleaning their chambers, courtrooms and other areas since 2000. On August 6th, Chief Judge Raner C. Collins and the other Judges held a special ceremony at the courthouse to say “thank you” to the Beacon workers for their hard work and dedicated service.

Among the special guests at the ceremony were Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild and U.S. Rep. Ron Barber, who was recognized as an AbilityOne Champion by SourceAmerica for his support of and efforts to help employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The event also gave Beacon Group the chance to thank the court’s newest Judge, Rosemary Marquez, for her years of service on Beacon’s Board of Directors. Judge Marquez had to resign from Beacon’s Board upon her appointment to the court.
Jonathan Rothschild, U.S. Representative Ron Barber, Chief Judge Raner C. Collins; Tucson’s newest Federal Judge, Rosemary Marquez (a former CEO/President Steve King and SourceAmerica President Bob Chamberlin present an AbilityOne Champion Award to Rep. Barber (at center).

Longtime champion of disabled worker rights and productivity, poses together with Chief Judge Raner C. Collins and proud Beacon clients. One heard many praises honoring Beacon clients and associates for their dedicated janitorial work at the DeConcini Federal Courthouse.
Motorcycle Gang!

This last August, there was a motorcycle rally called the “Three Flags Classic.” The idea is to ride from Mexico up to Canada (three flags refers to three countries). The ride began here in Tucson before heading south to the border. Beacon was asked if we could provide a mobile wash service to riders — who came in from all around the country — to get their bikes cleaned before starting the rally.

Beacon’s mobile car wash crew set up shop at the Doubletree Hotel to offer bike cleaning for a set price. Beacon clients and staff were treated to a different experience from their normal car-cleaning while raising funds for Beacon’s programs.

Take Me Out to the Ballgame!

Sunday, August 24th was Disability & Human Services Day at Chase Field. Beacon took the opportunity for a staff outing to watch the Arizona Diamondbacks vs. Padres. Almost 50 staff members and their families attended. They got to walk on the field prior to the game and even had some staff family members participate in a Hot Dog Race!
Beacon’s parents have joined forces with other parents of adult children with disabilities to “show up, stand up, and speak up” on behalf of their children and their family. They have something to say about the government and some advocates’ efforts to take away employment choices that they believe works best for them.

Joining with parents from Goodwill, TCH and Achieve, our parents want to be heard about plans to close sheltered workshops and even the jobs in community run by them. So far, the bureaucrats and “do-gooders” have not asked or allowed parents to give their input before imposing their “one size fits all” fix to a problem that never really existed. We are trying to change all that.

The *My Job, My Choice AZ* campaign has a Facebook page where we are giving parents information about efforts to take employment options away from them, and opportunities to speak up on what is best for their children. There were two actions directly from Washington, D.C. this summer that already will affect some of our families. The President’s Executive Order on Federal Contracts requiring a minimum wage of $10.10 an hour could mean that up to ten current Beacon clients would lose their jobs because they cannot keep up at that pace.

The new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) will require schools to make students with disabilities try to work at regular jobs in the community before they would be allowed to get supported work experience in a sheltered environment like Beacon.

This last summer, there were a series of public forums (*photo below*) for something called Arizona Employment First. This initiative promotes and focuses on employment in typical work settings as the primary daily activity for adults with disabilities. In many states, this initiative has been used mainly as an attack on sheltered work environments as an option for these individuals and their families.

Our parents were pretty vocal about their choice of work options and what’s best for their children. We hope they were heard “loud and clear” by the decision-makers from Phoenix.

Lastly, Beacon has recently produced three powerful videos with some of our parents talking about the negative impact and unintended consequences of those efforts to take employment choices away from them. Well-meaning or not, those advocates and bureaucrats are saying things about sheltered work environments that are simply not true and do not reflect the feelings and choices many of our parents have made on their children’s behalf. We urge you to get actively involved!
**Annual CAMPAIGN**

**2014 “Drive to Thrive”**

You can support the work of Beacon with a tax-deductible year-end contribution. Donations also qualify for the Arizona Tax Credit. Donations can be mailed in, dropped off at the front desk or made online on our website (www.BeaconGroup.org). You can make a general donation, gift in memory or honor of someone else, or contribute to a special project or need.

Examples of special budget areas in need of your support would be the Parents’ Campaign — *My Job, My Choice AZ*, the Phoenix outreach to open more employment sites in the Phoenix area, or our *Flagpole* project. Businesses and individuals can donate or sponsor a “paver” in their name or in honor of someone else. These pavers will be part of the flagpole base and will become a lasting dedication.

To reserve a dedication paver or for any questions about donating to Beacon, call Patrick McCarthy at (520) 622-4874 ext. 166 or pmccarthy@BeaconGroup.org.

---

Charlotte Spotlight

Victoria Novelli (pictured second from right) has made great strides with personal and professional development at Beacon Group. Look for her story inside on Page 3.