CLAWS AND WINGS:
AN ORAL HISTORY EXPLORATION OF DISABILITY IN DELAWARE 1917-2017

Transcription of video recorded July 26, 2017
Interviewer: Kim Burdick, MA, MPA (Referred to hereafter as KB)
Interviewee: Andrea Guest (Referred to hereafter as AG), Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Topics included: Sheltered Workshops, Community Employment, DE Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act
Run time: 30:38

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AG: I'm Andrea Guest and I'm the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the state of Delaware. I'm a native of Wilmington so I've been here pretty much all of my life. I did go away and attend college in New York at Syracuse University but came back and began my career here.

KB: Where did you go to high school?

AG: I went to P.S. DuPont.

KB: And tell me about your mother.

AG: My mother? [KB: Her job.] Well, interestingly enough, when I came back from college I was looking for a job and really didn't know what I wanted to do. I had worked in communications for a while, I worked at Channel 12 News many, many years ago. But just really was trying to find something that I could be passionate about and really cared about. And at that time my mother was working for an agency, it was a non-profit agency called DIMS, which was the Delaware Interagency Motor Service, which was the forerunner of the State Specialized Transportation Services that we have now. So, at that time she said, "Well, you know we need some drivers. Why don't you come work for us for a while?"

So I did that and what it involved was transporting people with disabilities who needed to go a variety of places: to community centers, appointments. And it was interesting because I found it wasn't just about driving, but a lot of the work was the conversations that I had with individuals when we were riding to appointments. And at that time I thought, hmmm, maybe I would be interested in working in the field, with people with disabilities.

And, later on, through my mother actually again, she knew of a position that was open, at that time it was United Cerebral Palsy, and I had no idea what it was about, but I went on the interview and it was a small program that was working with individuals with disabilities to actually help them enter into sheltered employment. I guess the VR agency at that time, which I work for now, had determined that these were people that would not be able to work in the community independently and also would need to learn some more skills so that they could that could even work in a sheltered workshop. So that was the first program that I worked in for people with disabilities that was about employment.

KB: Talk about the dance studio that Mildred Bryan had and the swim classes.

AG: Well, when I was a young child growing up in Wilmington I went to a dance studio, pretty much all of my childhood starting at age 3, and it was Mildred Bryan Dance Studio. And, you know, it was a lot of little girls primarily that went. I didn't realize at the time how unusual that was because, I'm talking about the late 1950s early '60s, but Mildred Bryan at the time always had classes for blind students and she taught them tap dancing and other kinds of dancing. And when we did recitals or shows, which were actually at the now DuPont Theatre, she would just say, "OK. You're going to assist someone to go out and dance and take them off stage." And sometimes we would dance together. And it just never occurred to me that that was not typical and that was the really first kind of inclusion that I remembered.

And then in the summertime she and her partner taught swimming and they taught people with intellectual disabilities. That kind of exposure just seemed normal to me. I didn't realize unfortunately when I became an adult that that was not a typical experience, particularly for that time.

KB: Where were they swimming?

AG: I can't remember which pool they used to use, but I know the dance studio was on Union Street at the time. And I'm just having trouble remembering where, where the pool was located. And it's interesting, too, because in later years one of my summer jobs in college was I was lifeguard at the pool at Landis Lodge, which I believe is still there, and that was for individuals who are blind, so it was an interesting continuum of experiences.

KB: And so when you came back home you had a degree in journalism?

AG: I had a degree, a double major in communications and psychology.

KB: Then you went from being the driver to United Cerebral Palsy?

AG: Yeah, I worked for Channel 12 for a couple of years and then after that I went to United Cerebral Palsy. [KB: And what did you do there?] And that's where I worked in a program that was to help train individuals with disabilities who were referred by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that I direct now, and to help them prepare to enter work in sheltered workshops, which is, you know, really interesting at this point because at the time it was felt they couldn't work independently in the community so that if we provided them supports we could at least get them jobs. And primarily at that time it was Elwyn, where we would transition people there and teach them some skills in house. And I would go over to Elwyn Workshop and work with them there to try to get them acclimated.

KB: And where were the other sheltered workshops?

AG: At the time there were Opportunity Center and Goodwill had them and then there was Kent Sussex Industries. So there were a lot. And there were probably several thousand people who were working in the sheltered industry at that time.

KB: And what did they make? What did they produce?

AG: I mean the one thing I always remember when I went is we were banding plastic ware. You know, so you would take knives, plastic knives and spoons and count a certain amount, and wrap them, and band them. And I think I just, I never felt good about that, so

I think I just always remembered, like that's, you know, the kind of work we were doing. And it would always occur to me then, like, aren't there other things, you know, that folks who were working all around me, seemed quite capable of doing a lot more.

KB: Because they were intelligent but it was just the general [thing].

AG: That was the contracts that they got. I'm sure that they had other ones too, but they were mostly putting things together, packaging and that kind of thing.

KB: So what about Easter Seals? When did that come in?

AG: Well, our program at UCP merged with Easter Seals. Easter Seals at the time was a much larger organization providing services to individuals with disabilities, so at the time it was called a pre-vocational training prior to any kind of work. So, we merged with Easter Seals probably that all occurred around 1978, something in that area. And, when we got over there, we were doing essentially the same kind of work, getting referrals from the voc rehab program, helping people go to sheltered workshops, until I was talking with one of the other staff. And at that time I had also become the director of that small program at Easter Seals and I was reading about services called supported employment that a gentleman, professor at Virginia Commonwealth University was starting, called Supported Employment, his name was Paul Wehman, and I thought, "Boy, that really sounds interesting." What he was saying was that the same individuals that we were helping go to sheltered workshops, if you can actually train them and provide supports, the same individual should be able to work in the community and make a livable wage.

And, it was a really different concept at that time and I approached the state VR agency and said, you know, since they were funding the folks that we were working with, would you be willing to support this kind of program? And they said, "Well, let's, you know, we've sort of heard about it, but it's not something we're being asked to do yet, so, you know, if you want to do it on your own, fine. We're not there yet."

So, I remember I hired a woman and that was after I had spent some time at VCU, Virginia Commonwealth, with Paul Wehman. I was there for a few weeks, just really learning what they were doing and watching it in action. And, when I came back, hired a woman to be what we now call a "job coach." And it was the kind of thing where it's just, you know, you just go and do it. You know, a lot of times in non-profits and government you want to, you know they say you have to have these really formal plans and to design the program and make sure it's going to work and we just thought, you know, let's take a couple people and try it and see what happens. And it worked! Not for everyone, but for most people.

And I remember the first job was taking a young lady to a bakery. And we had gone to the bakery first and told them what were trying to do and they were willing to give it a shot. So we took the young woman to the bakery and the job coach at the time, her name was Jan, and she worked with her and trained her in particular tasks on the job. And so, instead of going to sheltered work, she went and worked at the bakery.

And from there we started doing more and more supported employment. And I guess it was a couple of years after that the state VR program did start initiatives, and it was called the State Change Model Program, that they wanted to implement supported

employment programs throughout the state. And at that time, that's getting into around 1986, and I had just had my daughters, I have twins, and I was asked if I wanted to work on the State Change program, and it would be an independent consultant kind of thing, so I thought that sounded nice, it would give me some flexibility and also really interested in helping the state implement supported employment as an employment model.

So, I went and I worked for the state for a couple years and tried to help implement that. It was pretty slow going in the beginning because it was such a radical concept at the time. And, you know, it's interesting because when I take a step back from that when, you know, when I know we're coming up on the 27th anniversary of the ADA, and at that time, 27 years ago, when we were going to all the sessions about the and learning about the ADA, at the end of it, and Justin Dart came to Delaware, and we all went, and were listening to him and, you know, all these great new initiatives that were being done. And I remember at the end of the session they asked us to write down…I don't know if the question was, what independence meant to us for people with disabilities or how it was worded, but I wrote about doing away with sheltered employment and creating, you know, a world where people with disabilities could work competitively in the community and wrote that out.

And I know a couple of years ago when they had the 25th anniversary someone went on a web site and they has actually saved all the things that were written and I have it in my office now, in my handwriting that that many years ago still kind of, you know, doing the same thing and working to help move people from you know, sheltered workshops or day programs into competitive, integrated employment. But you know at least allowing them to work, people to work to their full potential. And, it's been a long time, it's been a lot of years, but we're making progress.

I mentioned when I first went to Elwyn to help people transition to sheltered work there were thousands of people in Delaware that were in, working in sheltered workshops. And, doing the data recently, we're probably, there's a little less than 400 and we're getting referrals for those folks who are wanting to come to the Vocational Rehabilitation program and move into competitive employment.

So, sometimes it seems slow, but there has really been a lot of progress made. [KB: A drastic change, yes.]

KB: So tell me about Justin Dart. Who was he?

AG: Justin Dart, as they say, is the godfather of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And, as I said, that came about around 27 years ago now, and he was a friend and a, I can't remember what his formal job was, but during the Bush administration, that was the first George Bush. And his hope and dream was for people with disabilities to be truly integrated into society and into the community. And he was able, on his own, because he had the personal resources to do it, to really travel around the country and talk to people. You know, as I had mentioned, he came to Wilmington, Delaware. I would bet that he went to every state and talked to people about what needed to be done and the independent living movement at that time and what kind of things needed to happen to truly integrate people into society.

KB: Do you know why he got so interested in that view?

AG: Well, I think it was his personal… He had a disability himself and I think that that was what started him down that path. And, as I said, he was fortunate to have some family resources that he could travel and make this his mission in life and inspire other people.

KB: So, what's the Mancus Foundation?

AG: The Mancus Foundation is a non-profit that has been around for quite a while and really started I believe as a way for people with disabilities, and their friends who did not have disabilities to come together and socialize. And I know there would be a lot of dinners and field trips and that kind of thing. And I believe they're still in existence.

KB: Is Daniese involved in that?

AG: I'm not sure. I'm not real sure.

KB: Ah, Justin Dart, Tupperware family. So what…some of these laws still need some teeth. What would you do to change these kind of things?

AG: Well, on the employment side, the new Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, which was signed actually almost, it's about 2½ years ago, and it was the only law that was passed during the Obama administration in Congress and it encompasses a lot of changes in the workforce system for all people. And our Vocational Rehabilitation agency is part of that law, and for people with disabilities, there are some new requirements in it that really help us move the needle towards inclusion. And two of the things it did: it focuses a lot of resources, being money and programs, on young people, and that's something we've done a little bit in our agency, but I think to truly create meaningful change, we do have to start with young people.

And the new law that we have now has caused us to create a lot more programs with students and schools. We're working with young people when they're 14 years old and helping them develop and design their career pathways, just as their peers in school are. And that's really the goal, too,. It's not to make students or people with disabilities look or feel different. It's how do you get them access to the same things that their peers are doing when it might mean they need some additional supports or time in order to achieve the same goals? So the WIOA really does put a lot of teeth in that.

There's also a provision in the law now that's called Section 511 that requires us to assess every individual that's in a sheltered workshop and to make them aware of the services that are available to them at the VR agency so if they want to choose community employment that they can be referred and do that. And we're starting to get a lot of referrals that way.

So I think that that new law really has really helped. But the bottom line, too, is people's attitudes have to change and sometimes you really can't do that with legislation or other kinds of things. It's that people have to, you know, be willing to work and play and live in inclusive environments, but we're seeing a lot of that change in that area, too, because a lot of that means just doing it. And that's what we find with our students. There's a lot more inclusive interaction with our young folks because that's how they've grown up and they're used to that.

They're not in as many, I mean I know there still are a few what we call segregated schools and programs, we're starting to see more, you know, integration within the schools. And that's really the key.

KB: So, there's some note here about Red Clay School District and hospital. What do you know about that?

AG: Well, one of the model employment programs that we work with now is called Project SEARCH and it's part of a national initiative. A woman that, actually she's a nurse named Erin Riehle, started this program at a Cleveland hospital and she was a nurse there and I'm, I'm not sure how she became interested in working with people particularly with intellectual disabilities, but just found that it wasn't so much when they were coming to maybe intern or work in the hospital that they wouldn't be able to do jobs. It's that no one was providing them training to do them. And she felt that if you can provide folks with intensive training that they can learn a particular job. So, but it has to be at the workplace. You can't do it just in a classroom and then expect that they're going to transfer those skills to the workplace. So. She began this model, mostly in hospitals but it can be done in other venues, with other employers.

And we started this model about…I think we're in our 6th year at, with Christiana Care. We're going into our 3rd year at Kent General and we're going to be starting a new site, actually with the State of Delaware, in DelDOT, in September, and we have another hospital coming on board later.

And it's very successful. It works with students who are in their final years of school which can be, some students can go to school till they're 21, so they could be 18 or 19 or even 20, and we partner with Red Clay School District at Christiana Care. And Christiana obviously is our host employer and it's the Vocational Rehabilitation program and we hire provider agencies and they job coach young folks. And they work around the hospital. They do 12-week internships and they rotate and they follow the school year. But at the end of the school year, either the hospital may hire them, but if not, they've gained a lot of really good transferrable skills that we can place them in the community.

KB: What kind of things do they do in the hospital?

AG: They may work in the foods service area. Some of them work in the pharmacy. We have students who work in an area…there's a lot of equipment that moves around hospitals and when you've, when you follow certain students around to see what they're really doing, you get into the belly of the hospital, it's really interesting to see how much equipment there is. And, what we do a lot of time is they'll, they'll take a nursing job and there are a lot of things that nurses do that really aren't about nursing. And, if you can kind of pool those things together, you can almost create a position. I remember we had one young lady that's, she had list every day, and that's really what she would do, go and get a piece of equipment and retrieve it and take it where it would need to go.

So, there are a lot of jobs that support hospitals that are folks that have been working in. There's escorts. You need people to wheel folks in and out, you know, when they come or leave the hospital. So, there's…we probably have about 16 different rotation sites that they do. Cleaning, you know what – sterilization. All that equipment has to be cleaned and sterilized. Laundering. So there are many, many tasks within a hospital that our

students have learned how to do quite successfully. And as I said several have been hired by Christiana. I would say they probably have hired close to 15 of our students in the last couple of years.

KB: That's pretty cool. And Bay Health?

AG: At Kent General Hospital also is doing the same program, quite successfully. So it's a similar model and they do the same types of tasks and follow the exact same model at Christiana. And both programs, the one at Bay Health and at Christiana, have in the last two years have won Superstar in Education awards, they've been recognized nationally. So, they've, they've both been quite successful. And a lot of that is because one thing I think we do pretty well in Delaware is partner with both government agencies and the private community, as well as our non-profits.

KB: What about being speakers at libraries and different places? How do you get the word out to get partners and volunteers and help?

AG: I think just being, our staff, I mean from the Vocational Rehabilitation side, we're involved in the community and we reach out with folks and try to connect as much as we can. We also have internally about 20 people on our staff who we call Business Service Representatives and they're out on a daily basis just, you know, meeting with employers, talking to employers, with the end goal of finding people jobs, but also offering our services. You know, people think it's not just that we have this population of people with disabilities that needs to be hired, but when we meet with employers many of them have employees with family members that have disabilities, or they themselves may be developing something that we can assist with, and talk a lot about how do you accommodate people at the workplace? Sometimes people have been working for many years and they acquire a disability and need an accommodation, so we can provide that kind of information, to find out what their needs are. You know, it's not just about us asking for something, but also finding out what the needs of employers are.

KB: So, you were kind of in the beginning of ADA. What impacts have you seen? How have you gotten involved in that?

AG: I mean I think I've been mostly involved through the employment initiatives and that's been my career and the work that I do. But, I think, as I said, the ADA is really in my mind, it's, it's a way of life and philosophy. And it's, it's about inclusion and we try to, you know, help people facilitate inclusion for people with disabilities, but also, you know, you have to practice it yourself and I know in our workplace, we always try to make sure that we're hiring people with disabilities. What we say when we post a job the first thing we ask is, do we have any of our own clients who would be qualified for the position? So, I think it's one thing to, you know, to talk about it, but whether you're a professional in the field, you know, you have to practice it.

KB: So if you could be remembered for anything in the future, what would you want people to say about you?

AG: About me? Oh, my gosh! Feel like I'm writing my… [Laughs] Just that, in, you know, in my world, which I guess, you know, as I said, is working to facilitate employment for people with disabilities, that I had <u>some</u> impact. That, you know, I can see from the beginning when we started that there were, as I said, thousands of people

working in sheltered employment, or not working at all, and have we moved those numbers, you know, are more people able to access competitive, integrated employment? And if I can see that that's changed, I'll feel like I've made a difference.

KB: And you did, right?

AG: I hope so! I think we have the data to show. But, it's, it's not just me. It takes, you know, many, many people working together to make it happen. Just, you know, the best example is a program like Project SEARCH, where you have to have five or six agencies and groups coming together to make, make it work.

KB: And if you had a magic wand what would you change? What would you make happen in the future?

AG: If I had a magic wand? I think that there was just, that there were more people who would want to get involved and just, and take a chance, you know, and try and think about an inclusive workforce, and not just do it because they know somebody with a disability or they have a child with a disability, but just that, you know, society as a whole that we just really live in an inclusive environment that, that everyone has access and equal opportunity to, to be successful, and just to live a happy life. 'Cause I mean I think the bottom line is we all want the same things. It's just that everyone doesn't have the same opportunities. So for me, it's about providing opportunities.