

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay folks, we're going to get started in a second.

Does everybody have a seat?  
Are we okay that way?

Are we on?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.  
Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here this morning. I know it's a Saturday. And it's a nice day outside but I really appreciate everybody coming to participate in the conference today. And it's my pleasure to come and share information with all of you.

My name is Jamie Ray-Leonetti. I'm an attorney with the Pennsylvania client assistance program.

Which is a statewide advocacy program, designed to help people with all types of disabilities, who are trying to get services from the

office of vocational rehabilitation, what you might know as OVR, Centers for Independent Living or CILSs and a few other programs that get money under title I under the rehabilitation act. If you're dealing with any of those programs, and you need some assistance, you can feel free to give me a call or give one of the other advocates in my office a call and we would be more than glad to help you.

Just for reference, if you're looking at your big binder that you got as part of the conference materials, my information is under tab 3, just to make it realities I for you to contact me, if you have a question later on you need to get a hold of me. The first thing I'm supposed to do here this morning is to provide you with some kind of introduction.

But while I was sitting in the

plenary session we had this morning, I kind of changed what I wanted to do in that regard.

Because I decided, that it would be important to share with you, especially the young people that are here, a personal story about how it is that I actually became a lawyer.

So here we go.

I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer when I was around 11.

Which I know is a little bit unusual, someone might not decide on their career goal at that age but in fact, that's what happened to me.

And I tried to pursue different things. I mean when you're 11, you obviously can't get a job but I would try to volunteer and my grandmother had a lawyer she always used he would let me do some volunteer little things in his office, filing and things like that.

And so I kind of kept this goal

alive in that way.

And so then I got to be around 16 or so, and I happened to be a person who has CEREBAL PALSY, so I'm in the doctor's office for my yearly check in with the people at Hershey Medical Center you know, I said something about this goal, that I had at becoming a lawyer because now I'm 16 and I really got to be thinking about this, I got to plan for college and all these things.

So this doctor, who I've never seen before in my life because every time you go to Hershey Medical Center you see somebody different. Takes a good hard look at me and says well, gee, I think that is a really lofty goal for someone like you. Someone with CP. I think you really need to think about that.

Well, I thought about that for about one minute and I looked at my mom and I said, mom, I think that --

I really need to talk to you outside.

And I grabbed my staff and we went in the hall I said, mom, I can't be in there with this guy you know you have to find me someone else.

And my mom listened to that and she got me out of there and that was the last I thought of that. All I can tell you is that, if anyone, anyone, I don't care who it is, ever looks at you and you're telling them what you want to do with your life and they tell you that, that's too lofty of a goal or that's ridiculous or any of that garbage, you just get out of there.

Because that's not where you need to be.

Now, enough said about that.

Let me get to what I'm really supposed to be talking about.

[Laughter.]

And what I can talk about because I didn't listen to that guy.

Okay.

You guys are here because you want to learn something about reasonable accommodations and how you can get those accommodations if you are in a job setting, if you're at the work place. Okay?

You need to know a little bit of background first. I'm going to go over that background fairly quickly so we can get into the real life examples.

There are certain laws that are going to protect you as you move from high school into the working world.

And I'm going to go over briefly some of those laws today.

The first one, probably the biggest one is the Americans with Disabilities Act or what we're now calling the Americans with Disabilities Act amendments act.

Because the law had some amendments placed on it, that went

into effect January 1, 2009. The second law you may hear a lot about and may deal with in your work life is called the rehabilitation act of 1973.

And the last time -- I'm just assuming that everybody here is from Pennsylvania, is there anyone that doesn't live in Pennsylvania?

Okay.

The last one is the Pennsylvania human relations act.

Which is a state law instead of a Federal law.

Okay.

Now, the ADA amendments act, what does it do?

Well, it does a lot of things. One big thing that it does is provide protections at work to people who have disabilities.

Okay?

But a big question is, who has a disability?

Now, this is a very sticky issue and I'm not going to go into it, in great detail here because for purposes of this workshop, we're going to assume that anyone who is here and listening and trying to get this information, is somebody who meets that definition of being disabled.

Okay?

I'm going to tell you something really important about the ADA amendments act. When Congress got the idea to make amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act the ADA, the main reason they decided to make those changes was because they didn't like the way the courts were interpreting what it means to be disabled. They thought the courts were being way too strict and way too narrow and really cutting out individuals, people who were intended to get the protections of the ADA.

And because of that, they went back and you'll see a handout that you have in my materials that talks about the ADA and one of the big, big, big things that they did was they said, look -- in order for you to have a disability, you don't have to be completely unable to do a particular task or a particular job. Okay. That's really the direction the courts were going in. You just have to be limited in some way. We want to make that question, that hurdle that you have to jump over, we really want to make that easy.

So I'm here to tell you that Congress has tried to improve the law for people with disabilities. We're not sure how that is going to play out because these amendments are so new and we have not seen a lot of court cases under the new amendments yet but we're keeping our fingers crossed and we're hoping that all of

you are going to be somebody who is protected under that law.

Okay?

Now, I'm going to talk briefly about the rehabilitation act because that is the act that a lot of you might be dealing with if you choose to go to the office of vocational rehabilitation to try to get services.

Is there anyone here whose never heard of OVR before, office of vocational rehabilitation?

Okay. Great.

Okay.

So OVR as you all probably know is the State agency, that gets Federal funding to provide you with services that may help you to get or keep a job.

Or, to advance in your job, okay?

Now, what a lot of people come to me and say they don't know is that

OVVR is actually a place where you can get some reasonable accommodations and some assistive technology, if that's what you need, to help you out in the work place.

So I'm going to talk a little bit about that as we go through the program today.

Is there anyone just wants to share, I'm not trying to put anyone on the spot. But is there anyone that thinks that they have a good working definition of what a reasonable accommodation is?

I'm not talking about the legal definition. I'm talking about what it really means when you need one and you want to go out there and use it.

Anyone got any ideas?

Yes, ma'am. But wait until someone runs you a microphone. There we go.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Reasonable accommodation would be if, um, you

had difficulty accessing a building for instance, but they were able to provide your station, in a place where you could have ready access to it.

They would not have to change the essential job just maybe, relocate the set up so that you could reach it.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay. I think that's an excellent example. And I think that we can call that relocation.

Anyone else?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I believe that a reasonable accommodation would be that they would be able to have people that would support someone with the disability, above all being knowing and caring what the disability is and of course the limitation and being able to assist that person achieve his daily, monthly or yearly goal.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.  
I'm going to call that two things.  
One thing I'm going to call it is  
supports and the other thing I'm  
going to call it is a job coach.

Anybody else?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, I  
knew someone who had a job answering  
phones but she was blind, so they  
allowed her to come in and they  
adapted their operating system to --  
with the support of blind and visual  
services. It was an a say I have  
technology.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.  
I knew it was going to happy knew  
someone was going to get to an  
assistive technology example.  
Excellent.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: So we just learned something vital. That is that AT, assistive technology, is only one kind of a whole bunch of reasonable accommodations that are possible.

And we have not even scratched the surface on the reasonable accommodations that are available and out there.

I just want to give you a real quick visual example. Okay. If I'm someone who has a visual impairment and my difficulty is that I have a hard time reading words that are written straight across because

my eyes jump they don't follow the line, okay?

A reasonable accommodation, that is also viewed as a piece of assistive technology could be as simple as a stiff piece of paper. Okay.

Because I'm going to take that stiff piece of paper I'm going to line it up under the words and suddenly that's going to eliminate the jumping I'm going to be able to read that printed text straight across.

So a lot of times when people talk about assistive technology, they're thinking, computers, software, hardware, all these big expensive things.

I think it's important to realize especially when you're out there talking to employers or you're in the work setting, that not all reasonable accommodations are

expensive.

In fact, there's several studies out there that say a lot of reasonable accommodations that people need at work you know, cost less than \$34. Okay?

Now that's not to say that someone won't need something like a software adaptation that the lady in the back mentioned. That might be more expensive.

But it is just a matter of educating employers that, hey, it's not all about the cost. You know, sometimes a Ford car will do the job you don't need a Cadillac to accommodate somebody at work.

Okay.

What do you do if you're someone who is out there you're on your first job and you think you need something to help you out at work?

What are your responsibilities in that instance?

Okay.

Maybe you've never faced that situation before and you're wondering what do I need to do?

And if there's one thing that I could tell you, that I would hope that all of you would take from this workshop, that is, that if you're in the job or you're starting the job and you think you need something, don't be afraid to ask for it.

And in fact, it's your responsibility to ask for it.

If you think you need it -- and it's your responsibility even if you know you need something, but you're not quite sure what that something is. Because asking is very empowering, asking is what puts the employer in a situation where they then need to have a dialogue, a talk with you. They need to sit down with you and try to work out, first of all, can we identify what you need

in order to do the job?

And second of all, can we sit down and identify how we're going to get these things and how we're going to bring them into this work site and make them work for you. Okay?

But without that initial asking, the employer might not even know that you need something. Okay?

It could be a situation where the employer has never worked with an employee who has a disability. They may not even know where to start.

So -- remember, that you are in charge and you have the power to ask.

Okay?

Now once you ask, remember that I said, that that is supposed to start a talk, a dialogue between you and the employer. Okay? The ADA amendments act says that talk has to take place. That dialogue, that interaction.

Okay.

But we all know what is going to come up as part of that talk.

It's going to be, who the heck is going to pay for this reasonable accommodation, who is going to pay for the assistive technology that I need at work.

Okay. There are a few answers out there that I just want to share.

Okay. One program that we've already talked about is the office of the vocational rehabilitation bureau of blindness and visual services.

Okay.

OVR and BVS. They are certainly a resource for assistive technology or other accommodations that you might need either in searching for a job, getting a job or actually advancing in a job that perhaps you already have.

So you might wonder, how do I connect up with the OVR and BVS services in my area? Well, there are

many, many OVR/BVS offices across the State of Pennsylvania. The one that serves you is going to be determined by the county that you live in.

So -- you can actually -- you can either Google labor and industry and get a list that way. Or you can actually go to the client assistance program web site and we have went ahead and posted a list of all the OVR/BVS agencies in the State and what areas they serve on our web site to try to make it easy for folks.

So I'm going to write up our web site.

Okay. Our web site is [www.equal employment.org](http://www.equal employment.org).

No spaces. If you go on there, you'll find a list of OVRBVS agencies in your area. I want to talk a little bit about going to OVR and getting services. The first thing you'll need to do is go through an application process.

So I want to be clear that you're not going to walk in the door of your local OVR or BVS and come out with assistive technology or other accommodations.

Okay. There is a process.

But for those of you who might be social security either SSI or SSDI recipients you're going to be presumed to be eligible for those services, so you're going to need to provide some documents, some medical records, but it's not going to be too strenuous of a process. And for those who might not be social security recipients, that doesn't cut you out.

You may still be eligible for OVR/BVS services if your disability creates a substantial impediment, a substantial barrier to you becoming employed, keeping your job or advancing in a job that you already have.

A lot of people are very, very surprised to hear that you can actually be working in a job someplace, giant, Burger King and WAWA whatever it is, be eligible for the services if the job is nothing more than your job. It's not your career goal. Okay.

So that's an important thing to keep in mind.

One of the things I have on my outline to share with you today is information about how to get help, if you request assistive technology or other services from OVR/BVS they tell you for any reason that they cannot provide what you need.

You can call the client assistance program. You can call me.

And we will provide advocacy to help you with that.

Because as we all know, OVR and blindness and visual services don't

always say yes and sometimes they're right. And sometimes they're wrong. And someone from the outside needs to take a look at that.

And that's what we do.

There are two other assistive technology resources I'll talk about. I'll write them up for you and we'll talk about them a little bit.

Okay.

The first program is called PAIAT, I'm not supposed to use acronyms that is the Pennsylvania initiative on assistive technology.

And they actually have what is called a lending library.

And they have a location in the east which is housed at Temple University in Philadelphia. And they have a location in the west which is housed I believe there's a small one at the Hiram G Andrews center and also one in Pittsburgh. What is really cool about PIAT,

Pennsylvania initiative on assistive technology, you're having a situation you know you need something you're not quite sure what that something is, the Lending Library will let you check out to speak, different pieces of assistive technology and actually take those to your work place or your volunteer position or whatever it is that you're doing and try them out.

So you can get a hands on feel of whether this particular item is going to be right for you. They have all kinds of things there. They have closed circuit television -- CCTVs you can borrow. They have all different kinds of magnification devices.

You know, cassette players for people who are blind or visually impaired. Pretty much you know, if they have it there, you can check it out and use it.

So that is one resource.

The other resource is the Pennsylvania assistance technology foundation, what's great about them, they offer 0% loans for people who may need to get money to purchase assistive technology. It's another funding resource that's out there.

Now, what I want to do is just have us think about assistive technology in the real world a little bit.

And here's how we're going to do that.

I have two situations which are made up but they're based on real life experience and since our room is nicely divided into this half and this half, I'm going to assign each half of the room to one of these situations. Give you a couple minutes to all brainstorm and talk about it amongst yourselves and then we're going to come back together and talk about what kinds of things that

these two working aged individuals might be able to do, in order to get the assistive technology that they need for their jobs.

Okay?

So I'm going to speak to this side of the room first and tell you a little bit about your individual.

Your individual is my client, who is 21 years old.

And he has graduated from high school, his name is Sam.

Sam has a disability and he needs some speech activation software to help him at his job. But this -- okay. We're having a brief commercial break by a cart.

[Laughter.]

Any way, this guy, Sam, is at his first job and he really, really has no idea how to get the speech activated software he needs or what to do.

So -- I would like this side of

the room to try to come up with at least 3 things that Sam could do to get the speech activated software that he needs.

Okay.

Now, for those of you over on this side of the room, you're going to try to help out my other client, whose name for purposes of this exercise is Sarah.

Okay.

Sarah has actually been out of high school for a little while. And she has been at her job for about 2 years now.

But recently she got a new supervisor, and some of her job responsibilities have changed.

And she is actually feeling a little bit unsure as to whether she can do some of the new responsibilities and she remembers that when she first got the job, she had a job coach and now she is

wondering could I get that job coach to come back in and help me with learning some of these new functions that have been added on?

And she is also kind of been wondering, you know, with all these new functions, I think it's going to be really difficult, maybe to keep my day organized. I wonder if there's anything out there that could help me with that.

So -- what I want you guys on this side to think about is, what steps should Sarah take with her employer to get what she needs.

Okay?

So I see we have about 10 minutes remaining. So I just want you to take about 3, 4 minutes to kind of consider these two things and then we're going to regroup. Okay?

[brain storming among groups.]

This will give you an opportunity to introduce yourself to

your neighbors and do some of that networking we were talking about earlier.

Okay, guys I'm going to ask you to kind of regroup and come back here.

This is my lovely assistant Cheryl who volunteered to do writing.

>> SPEAKER: Remember flip charts do not have spell check.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: That's very good. Okay.

So -- first let's talk just a little bit about Sam. Over here.

And what ideas you guys may have come up with for Sam.

Anyone want to volunteer?

Yes, sir, your microphone is coming.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: My first -- my first thought was, to make a formal request to his employer.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Right. And that's just asking for

accommodation, right?

Great.

So ask.

What else, sir?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay, after you ask for the accommodation, and the employer tells you whether or not they have that accommodation readily available to them, if not, you want to consider other options.

And identify as far as the software you might need, what can you ask for or what's best suited for you.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.

So from that I get a couple things.

Talk about the options.

I'm also kind of hearing in that, look for other resources that are not just the employer themselves.

And maybe as you identify the resources, you're really also talking about what can I do to educate my

employer about what is out there.

What else?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I think we might want to go to either -- I would go to PIAT and see if I could try out some of those programs just to see which worked best for me. And if I needed help training I could go to Glenn's organization that would help train me over here at Centers for Independent Living and then maybe, I guess -- what was the name, assistive tech foundation if I needed a loan if I could not get the money through OVR or some other agency that would support me.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Well I thank heavens you mentioned OVR, I don't want to have you take the loan out before you check requested OVR.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: No I'm cheap.

[Laughter.]

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: As a last

resort if you exhausted all of them you could check with the Rotary and the local community service foundations that may be able to loan you money.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Great reach out to the community. We got some good ideas for Sam. I see now we have five minutes left I talk a lot. So now we're going to go over talk about Sarah for a minute. Because we don't want to leave her out. Now, Sarah's situation was a little different, she'd been in her job for awhile there were some changes, what things can you come up that might help Sarah.

This side of the room is very quiet. Now.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Similar to Sam actually first she would talk to the supervisor.

And discuss the new duties she needs help with.

Other things we also discussed was OVR and getting that job coach back and third thing, which there may be other ideas, the organization, requesting like either a job buddy or a visual to get the jobs in order.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.

So talk to the supervisor, get OVR involved to see if you can get the job coach back and maybe get a job buddy. I like those ideas.

Did anyone over here talk at all about any assistive technology that might be helpful to Sarah?

Was that discussed over there at all on your side?

Yes.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: We briefly talked about an organizer, we didn't think it was anything extravagant, maybe a binder or something posted in the work site, something she can look to. Very inexpensive, organizer day.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Okay.

If that doesn't work, maybe we might need to go to other kinds of assistive technology. Okay.

These are excellent ideas and I think that what you've done today is you've started a great discussion about how to get -- not just assistive technology but other kinds of reasonable accommodations that you might need at work.

I wish I could sit here and talk about these things all day with you because there's a lot more information that I could share. There's more information in your binder if you want to learn specifically about the ADA amendments actor if you're new to working with OVR or blindness and visual services and you want to get more information about how to deal with that, there is a handout under my tab that deals specifically with that.

I have to allow time for you guys to complete a very important evaluation form.

And I've actually -- well I've been given an announcement to that, I'm going to turn it over to my friend the announcer who is going to help you with that.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: In your binders you'll find the evaluation. Now, we would like if you could, fill out the entire evaluation. If not, if you could just identify if you receive social security services. For those of you who don't have a binder, I do have some evaluations here that I can give you and, when you're finished if you want to leave it, at the tables I'll collect it after the session.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: I just want to add one thing while you're filling out your evaluations, Cheryl was kind enough to mention to me

another resource, job accommodation network or JAN.

And if you Google them, they will come right up on the first page I guarantee it.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: OVR won't step in, until you're 21.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Oh, my. Now I have pain. Agony.

Okay.

This could be -- wait. This could be a whole other workshop which I'm not authorized to provide. But I'm going to tell you this.

If anyone is being told that OVR is not going to step in until you're 21 or anything that is similar to that, just make sure you call me at the office, because that is not true.

They like to say that but that is not the law.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'll talk to you I got them involved.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: They will  
consult they won't offer anything.

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: Oh,  
yes, they will. They don't want to  
see me coming.

[session concluded.]

>> JAMIE RAY-LEONETTI: I also  
said, don't forget to ask, that is  
what empowers you.