

MASWM

Dignified and meaningful employment for people with disabilities...Quality services for Missouri.

Missouri Day on the Hill Promotes Workshop Success

by MASWM President Bruce Young

On July 14, MASWM, along with the Porter Group and ACCSES, hosted our very first Missouri Day on the Hill.

This was our first major opportunity to provide some of our employees and their families the chance to share their stories firsthand with the Missouri Delegation. There were over 22 in attendance that included employees, parents, family and

Board members and, of course, workshop managers and staff. It was undoubtedly a huge success.

We started the day with a breakfast at the Porter House, which is literally across the street from the Congressional parking garage. After breakfast, we headed over to the Capital, where our busy day began.

We met with a good number of our Missouri Delegation in a special meeting

room next to the Senate Chambers. Both Senator Blunt and Congressman Billy Long came by and heard from several members of our delegation. Jon Porter, Randy, Mike and Kate McSweeney of ACCSES did a tremendous job of explaining the importance of Missouri's extended employment program.

The stars of the day were our employees
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U.S. Congressmen Jason Smith (left) and Lacy Clay (right) spoke with workshop employees Nick Beauchaine of Industrial Aid in St. Louis and Amy Easter of MCII in Farmington during Missouri Day on the Hill.

Taking the Missouri Message to Washington, D.C.

On a hot and humid day in July, Missouri workshop supporters did something that had never been done before—they took their message to the nation's capital.

Missouri Day on the Hill July 14 saw managers, parents and workers with disabilities walk from office to office across steaming D.C. sidewalks. Changing plans and navigating Washington schedules and protocols, they spoke directly to some of the nation's leaders and their staff

members.

MASWM Legislative Co-Chair Randy Hylton noted the event began with an impromptu breakfast "pre-meeting" in the offices of the Porter Group, followed by a five-block walk to the Capital.

There, former Nevada Congressman Jon Porter and his son, Chris, helped the delegation meet with some of the nation's elected officials and staff members. Senator Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) had reserved a

special room for the group and met with them extensively.

Especially dramatic were presentations by several parents and their adult children with disabilities. When they described the possibility of their workshops being forced to close by regulatory or other threats, tears were shed.

"It was extremely emotional as we asked people with disabilities to speak a

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Taking the Missouri Message to Washington, D.C.

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little about what workshops meant to them,” Hylton said. “They made very good points about their interest and willingness to be in workshops because of everything they have there.”

Tracy Gritsenko, director of Public Policy and Advocacy for Industrial Aid, agreed. “All of the legislators and their staffers were very attentive while talking with our employees and their parents,” she said. “They really wanted to know

about their experiences and how they could help. Parents and employees had a very powerful impact on the Missouri Delegation as a whole.”

Also emphasized was the variety of people with disabilities who are served by workshops. “It was clear that one size does not fit all,” Hylton said. “It’s why a range of (employment) options is important.”

Along with Senator Blunt, other officials included Congressman Billy Long of Missouri’s 7th District and Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler of the Missouri 4th District. Staff members for Congressman Sam Graves (R-6) were among those attending, and Congressman Lacy Clay (D-1) visited during an evening reception.



The Nevada A-Team with CEO Ed Guthrie have a new voice on Capitol Hill.

Missouri Day on the Hill

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and their families. By the time Amy and her father, Joe, finished their story of just how important work was for Amy, there was not a dry eye in the room. Lynn and Nick also shared their story about what work means to them. When our employees and their families are able to speak to the importance of work, it puts a totally different and very personal perspective on this very important issue.

Later, Senator Blunt and Congressman Long both made it very clear that they were in full support of Missouri’s extended employment program. Since July 14th was the last day of the summer session, we had to walk to several other offices in order to meet with the rest of the

delegation. At times we had to split up, and, at one point, even run through the Capital to make all of these appointments. I want to personally thank everyone who participated and helped make Missouri Day on the Hill such a tremendous success, including everyone from the Missouri Delegation and staff members who helped immensely.

The self-esteem and dignity of working and being productive is a very simple right, which cannot be denied or overlooked. Our employees should not be forced to sit at home and/or participate in a much more restrictive nonproductive day program situation. They should be allowed to choose where they live and work, just like everyone else.

Thank You!

MASWM would like to thank everyone who helped make Missouri Day on the Hill a huge success:

Workshop Employees: Amy Easter-MCII, Nick Beauchaine-Ind. Aid;

Parent/Guardians: Lynn Beauchaine, Joe Easter, Doug Geno, William Hayes;

Legislators: Senator Roy Blunt, Senator Claire McCaskill, Congressman Billy Long, Congressman Jason Smith, Congressman Lacy Clay, Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler;

Porter Group: Former Congressman Jon Porter, Chris Porter-CEO, Dan Mauer-Government Relations, Elizabeth Butler-Director Of Operations, Mitch Fox-Media Services;

ACCSES Staff: Terry Farmer-CEO, Kate McSweeney-Government. Relations, Gary Goosman-Director Of Operations;

Workshop Board Members: Paula Torkelson-VSI, Joe Easter-MCII, William Hayes-Laclede;

Workshop Managers and Staff: Bruce Young-CMSE, Mike Stroud-Industrial Aid, Tracy Gritsenko-Industrial Aid, Kit Brewer-RCSI, Courtney Murphy-Ozark-SWI, Brian Hogan-BVI, Jeff Arnold-MAG, Laura Miller-Pulaski County, J.W Gibbs-SWI, Valerie Gustin-SWI, Linda Kimrey-LaClede, Katie Jones-BCI, Nancy Geno-Valley Ind, and Randy Hylton-VSI.

Save the Date: MASWM Fall Meeting

The MASWM fall conference will be Oct. 5, 6 and 7 at the Hilton Promenade on the Branson Landing.

This is the same location we have held our last seven fall meetings.

Once we have a better feel for our training schedule, we will send a formal meeting announcement to the membership, probably around the end of August.

Cooperative Effort Continues to Progress on National Level

MASWM's efforts with the Porter Group and ACCSES in Washington, D.C. continue to progress. Led by former Nevada Congressman Jon Porter and his son, Chris, the organization is helping MASWM carry its message of employment choices for people with disabilities to the nation's leaders.

The Honorable Jon Porter noted a key message comes from workers with disabilities and their parents. "Congress cares about your businesses," Porter said. "But they are especially invested in the families; the families that are impacted by the services those businesses provide. That is what is critical. These members of Congress really do want to hear from fami-

lies."

Many of the parents also bring an additional perspective: they recall all too well the days before workshops offered alternatives to staying at home without employment options.

Porter credited MASWM and Missouri managers for their efforts to combat WIOA regulations, anti-14(c) trends and other issues that will actually reduce employment for people with disabilities, despite assumptions to the contrary. "The challenge is that we're in a marathon, but we have to sprint right now," Porter said. "Every day there are new interpretations. This is a very telling time for these families."

One hope is that other states will follow the "Missouri Model" set in 1965 with a wide range of extended employment options funded with a mix of local and state sources, combined with business contracts and other earned income.

"We need another Day on the Hill and to model these ideas for others," he concluded. "We have to keep the momentum up. We have to build on what we've started."

Workshops face a tsunami of threats to their future as regulations evolve in areas such as WIOA. "As the guidelines come out, there are things that weren't even in the legislation or the regulations. We're seeing a new threat every day."

Meeting of the Minds

Missouri Day on the Hill brought together workshop managers, parents, workers with disabilities and some of the nation's leaders. Among those who were at this session in the capital building were (standing, from left) former Congressman Jon Porter, U.S. Senator Roy Blunt and MASWM Legislative Chair Randy Hylton. This dialog took place in the nation's capital July 14 and was part of the daylong series of meetings.



Family Ties Make a Difference, Even with Professional Insight

Nancy Geno brings a unique perspective to workshops. A former U.S. Marine with 20 years of healthcare experience, she retired three years ago and began serving as Community Relations Director at Valley Industries in Hazelwood.

She also has a 65-year-old brother with developmental disabilities.

Nancy and her husband were asked to represent Valley Industries at Missouri Day on the Hill, July 14. Earlier that week, they participated in the ACCSES Annual Meeting.

"It was a week of emotion," she recalled. "One minute you were crying. The next minute you were angry. Everything just kept changing."

She was impressed with the ACCSES breakout sessions but also stressed her experience with her brother. "I think grow-

ing up, having a brother younger than myself being developmentally disabled, has taught me a lot. And being in this

"Many of the people like my brother cannot work in the private sector. I've seen what happens when they are forced to try."

(workshop) building with all of these people is humbling."

She noted the advantages of workshops often have to be seen to be understood. "The sense of pride, the self-esteem and friendships are so important," she said. "At the end of the day, they often express a sense of completion and independence that's awesome. They must have that chance and the right to choose."

Unfortunately, many want to limit those choices and assume everyone with a

developmental disability can find employment in the private sector. States where that has been tried have experienced over 60 percent unemployment among people with disabilities. Other issues include exploitation, bullying and sexual violence towards this vulnerable group.

"If I could stand in front of Congress, I would lay it out for them. Many of the people like my brother cannot work in the private sector. I've seen what happens when they are forced to try."

She concluded by urging all workshops and managers to become involved. The many forces pushing for an end to workshops is gaining strength. "This is a moving train," she stated. "It's not going to stop here. We must keep working and working hard."

Congresswoman Praises Workshop Efforts

Missouri Congresswoman Vicky Hartzler (R-4) has been a frequent visitor to workshops in her central-western Missouri district. Not surprisingly, she was active in the Day on the Hill activities.

"I enjoyed the event very much," she recently wrote. "I enjoyed visiting with the clients, their families and the leadership of several of Missouri's workshops. It was reinforcing to hear how important the shelters are to so many and how vital it is they stay open and viable in our communities."

Congresswoman Hartzler may hold a record for visiting nearly every workshop in her district. "I believe in their mission of providing meaningful work and a supportive community for those with disabilities. I love to meet the clients, see their enthusiasm for their work and hear from their families who are so thankful for the workshop and what it means to their loved one and to the community."

Applying the "Missouri Model" in other states could address some of the challenges facing workshops nationally. "I was surprised to learn when I went to Congress that other states do not prioritize work and (instead) follow a medical model. Missouri's work-based model is the better approach in fostering meaningful work for everyone. Other states, and the disabled citizens involved, would benefit from adopting our model."

Other issues will require serious effort

to counter misconceptions. "It is disconcerting to see the initiatives such as the push to eliminate special wage certificates, threaten our workshop system," Hartzler stated. "Our system allows wages to be based on productivity, which gives flexibility and allows more work contracts to come to the workshops."

Such proposals will prevent work from coming to workshops and bring the real possibility of closure. "These initiatives would end up hurting those they intend to help by forcing them to stay home, away from friends, and prevent them

from contributing to society."

Many parents worry that without workshops many workers will be forced to remain at home. "Businesses hire disabled adults when they can, but there are not enough jobs to meet everyone's needs and some individuals cannot succeed in a traditional workplace," Hartzler agreed. "Workshops are a 'win-win' for those individuals, giving them a place to engage in meaningful work where they can succeed. Forcing them to try to find work outside this setting is neither compassionate nor workable."



Joe and Amy Easter from Farmington (left) along with Lynn and Nick Beauchaine (right) from St. Louis were among the parents and workers who took the workshop message to Washington during Missouri Day on the Hill July 14.

National Leader Sees Both Challenge and Opportunity

ACCSES President and CEO Terry Farmer sees the rise of Missouri's efforts such as Day on the Hill as a significant development nationally.

"We are so enthusiastic about Missouri getting hold of the challenges we face as an industry nationwide," Farmer said recently. "The threats out there are very real and threaten all individuals with disabilities."

That's why it's critical for workshop managers, parents and consumers to take their message to the leaders of the nation. "Missouri is among the states leading the way. They're engaging their workers and family members, mobilizing and educating. That's a model for success."

An important step is to let leaders see workshops firsthand. "Developing a rela-

tionship with your representatives is critical. And letting representatives and their staffs see, feel and experience workshops will let them understand what's going on. When they see individual workers happy and engaged, when they hear from the loved ones about how good they feel, how they used to be listless and sit in front of the TV, and now they have pride and a paycheck, they'll understand so much better. This makes a difference."

Workshops may need to better communicate their historic support for employment options, choice and supports such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. But private employment is not an answer for all workers with disabilities and blindly attempting to replace workshops with that will lead to tragedy.

"We know that our economic marketplace struggles finding full employment for even the most capable workers in our society. There needs to be a place for those who struggle to find employment because of a disability."

One example is 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act and commensurate wages for people whose production is not equal to workers without disabilities. "Commensurate wage was intended and is still a viable tool to see that people have a job," he said. "If those options go away, the only option for some will be a kind of daycare. We're already seeing that in a few states like Maine, New Hampshire and Washington, and it's coming to Maryland. Letting that become the national standard will be a tragedy."