



**THE WELFARE PEER TA NETWORK**  
Office of Family Assistance

**Final Report**

**Peer TA Activity # 144**  
**Conducted for the Puerto Rico Administracion de Desarrollo**  
**Socioeconomico de la Familia**

**June 7-8, 2007**

**“Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the**  
**Puerto Rican TANF Population”**

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## **Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Puerto Rican TANF Population**

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants with learning disabilities face unique challenges in progressing from welfare to financial independence. These individuals may have reading, writing or mathematical difficulties; lack of organizational skills and executive functioning; and may be more likely to experience high unemployment or underemployment, all of which can hinder their ability to be successful and self-sufficient.

The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, as part of its ongoing mission to support the sharing of promising practices in welfare reform, joined with the Puerto Rico Department of the Family to focus on screening, assessment, and appropriate response to learning disabilities in Puerto Rico's TANF population.

### ***Introduction***

On June 7 and 8, 2007, the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network supported a one and a half day event in Puerto Rico, focusing on identifying and addressing learning disabilities. One hundred-seventy three participants, including leaders in the learning disabilities field, Federal agency staff, and representatives from the Puerto Rico Department of the Family and Vocational Rehabilitation, attended the meeting

Information describing learning disabilities and how they impact the WorkFirst environment was provided through education, inter-agency learning and the sharing of promising practices. Helpful tools were provided to participants for screening, assessing and interviewing clients, and to facilitate the development of local and regional action plans for immediate implementation.

In addition, the Puerto Rico Department of Vocational Rehabilitation presented information on their referral process and services they provide to TANF recipients and other clients. The vital importance of community and interagency partnerships was highlighted as localities move forward to integrate learning disabilities into their individual employability plans.

### ***Understanding Learning Disabilities and the Intersection with TANF:***

According to the National Joint committee on Learning Disabilities, a learning disability (LD) is a general term that encompasses a wide variety of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, and/or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumably due to a central nervous system dysfunction and may occur across the life

span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception and social interaction may co-exist with learning disabilities.<sup>1</sup> These disorders can interfere with a broad range of skills and functions and are most frequently observable in the areas of reading, writing and/or mathematics. Manifestations are also commonly found in attention, reasoning and processing, memory, oral communication, coordination and motor functions, social competencies and executive functioning skills such as organization, problem solving, prioritizing and self-management. It is not uncommon for individuals who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities to have other neurologically based disorders.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately twenty-five to forty percent of TANF participants have learning disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Learning disabilities are often overlooked and unidentified, as many low-income individuals enter into the welfare system without having had a formal assessment to detect a learning disability. National studies indicate that individuals who are not able to support themselves through work may be at a higher risk of having a learning disability, making it difficult for them to progress into a career path that would allow them to be independent of TANF financial assistance.<sup>4</sup> Often adults with learning disabilities are unemployed or underemployed. However, if their disability is recognized, individuals with learning disabilities can be quite successful.<sup>5</sup> TANF participants who have or are suspected of having learning disabilities will require reasonable and appropriate accommodations and modifications in the areas of education, training, and employment.<sup>6</sup>

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, as well as its recent reauthorization, present new challenges to states to help welfare recipients become self-sufficient. Previous welfare-to-work programs focusing on basic skills and occupational training helped those who could progress into employment and obtain higher wage jobs. Most recipients were referred to non-work related adult basic (ABE) and were less successful in achieving employment or earnings gains. Most ABE programs did not attempt to identify the prevalence of learning disabilities in the populations served. Consequently, many of these participants dropped out and did not pursue further training.<sup>7</sup>

This experience contributed to the shift away from educating and training clients toward a more “work first” approach, emphasizing rapid workforce attachment. Time limits and

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<sup>1</sup> National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Peer TA Roundtable Resource: What is a Learning Disability?

<sup>3</sup> Vera, M. (2007). Peer TA Roundtable Presentation: TANF Clients and Learning Disabilities

<sup>4</sup> Hercik, J. (2000). Peer TA Report: Identification and Development of Referral Systems for TANF Clients with Learning Disabilities.

<sup>5</sup> National Institute for Literacy (1999). Bridges to Practice: Guidebook 1, preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities.

<sup>6</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Roundtable Resource

<sup>7</sup> National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices (1998). Issue Brief: Serving Welfare Recipients with Learning Disabilities in a Work First Environment.

work requirements under TANF demand that recipients who were formally exempt or had been unsuccessful in welfare-to-work activities acquire and retain employment that will support themselves and their families. Basic skill deficiencies and learning disabilities that might prevent beneficiaries from finding and keeping a job must be addressed within the work context, merging education and employment and making special accommodations for those with learning disabilities that may preclude them from working.<sup>8</sup> Because of the recalibration of the caseload reduction credit, provisions in the reauthorized TANF law require states to engage significantly higher percentages of their caseload in work or work preparation activities (although it maintains the original 50% caseload requirement), while adding new categories of individuals in the calculation of Federal work participation rates.

Given the renewed emphasis on universal engagement and the recent recalibration of Federal work participation rates, it is critical that TANF clients be identified and assessed as soon as possible, that appropriate referrals to vocational and educational opportunities be completed, and that necessary pre-and post-employment accommodations be made to help learning disabled individuals reach their full potential in the workplace.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Screening for Learning Disabilities:***

Screening is a preliminary, systematic procedure that identifies characteristics or signs of a learning disability. It should be considered part of a complete assessment process that includes interviews, observations, surveys and reviews. Screening is not a diagnostic or clinical procedure, but should identify key elements of an individual's learning disability, as well as their strengths and attributes. A formal evaluation, completed by a qualified professional, should be conducted in order to make an accurate and comprehensive assessment.<sup>10</sup> Screening elements should be valid and developed for use with the target TANF population and criteria for the use of the tool and protocols for maintaining the confidentiality of the results should be established prior to implementation. Staff and agencies should be prepared to address potential co-related factors, such as possible medical conditions, and provide the next level of services necessary. A vital step in providing services is for organizations to have planned in advance how to clients to appropriate resources, services and activities that best suit both their needs and strengths.<sup>11</sup>

It is important that the client understands that screening activities are designed to assist them and that the information gained should be utilized effectively to determine next

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Hercik, J.

<sup>10</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Peer TA Roundtable Presentation: Screening for Learning Disabilities.

<sup>11</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Roundtable Resource.

steps. The data should not be used to make program recommendations or to label the client.<sup>12</sup> It is also important for the caseworker to listen and observe the client, providing positive and personal feedback. Screeners should do their best to remain nonjudgmental and establish a rapport with the participant. By focusing on the positive when gathering information, staff will learn more about the individual and how to better serve him/her. In addition, it is important for the client's own empowerment and sense of agency to target the strengths and individuality in his/her case.<sup>13</sup>

In New York, the *Empire State Screen: Learning Needs Screen for Spanish-Speaking Adults* was developed through a national effort evaluating four different scales. Used for screening for learning disabilities among Spanish speakers, the tool consists of eight background questions and eleven assessment questions. Scoring on these items indicates whether or not the client should be referred for additional assessment. To access the tool, [click here](#).

### ***Integrating and Accommodating Workers with Learning Disabilities:***

Many individuals who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities are not very educated about their disability and may have difficulty explaining it or advocating for themselves. This lack of awareness, coupled with a lack of recourses and accommodations, may lead to failure, especially in the realms of education, training and work.<sup>14</sup> Because learning disabilities are both persistent and pervasive, individuals suffering with them require a variety of support systems throughout their lives. Participants with learning disabilities need to identify and explore their strengths and weaknesses, be exposed to a variety of work environments and help in developing reasonable accommodations. A strong and well-developed support network fosters independence and self-sufficiency.<sup>15</sup>

When learning disabilities go untreated, there are serious, life long consequences, including a loss of self-esteem, delinquency and illiteracy. Learning disabilities are one of the most common obstacles to the employment of welfare recipients. However, when accommodations are made, there is a high probability of success in personal, academic and vocational settings. Adults with learning disabilities have many years of experience in coping with their limitations and have developed skills to help them navigate the world. Caseworkers need to highlight the importance of these skills and how they can be used to further advance a client's work skills and marketability.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Peer TA Roundtable Presentation: Screening for Learning Disabilities.

<sup>13</sup> Vera, M.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, N. (2007). Roundtable Resource.

<sup>15</sup> Vera, M.

<sup>16</sup> Vera, M.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a disability as a “physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of an individual,” listing specific learning disabilities as possible impairments and learning as a major life activity. The ADA requires that persons with disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, have access to and be accommodated in employment, transportation, public accommodations, state and local government activities, and communication.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, TANF and WorkFirst programs must ensure that individuals with disabilities are not excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of services or programs. Activities must be delivered by service providers who are accessible to individuals with disabilities; this is required in all aspects of service provision, including the application, screening and assessment process, plan development, work activities, sanctions and time limits. Adjustments can take place through advance actions that prepare programs to ensure equal access to services; it can also occur through the provision of accommodations and modifications that remove barriers and minimize the limitations created by disability.<sup>18</sup>

Accommodations are those modifications to the environment or essential functions of the program or job activities that effectively remove or minimize the barriers created by the disability. They do not replace knowledge, skills, abilities or performance requirements, but are meant to equalize one’s ability to understand and perform both effectively and efficiently. Participants with disabilities can be, and have been, successful when appropriate accommodations are made. Success for an individual with a disability involves the ability to identify “goodness-of-fit”, meaning that there is a positive relationship between the goals and the participant’s abilities to perform and have success. The investigation to find this balance may begin with a task analysis. By comparing the strengths of the individual with the essential functions and the requirements of the task at hand, a staff member can predict the likelihood of success. Based upon the analysis of the job functions and how they match with the strengths and abilities of the participant, an adequate assessment of whether or not modifications are needed can be made.<sup>19</sup>

If it is necessary to make service accommodations for clients with learning disabilities, an initial step is to present information in multiple ways. Combinations of oral and written, as well as picture and print materials, may be useful for clients with limited or no reading skills or those with auditory processing deficits. Services should be designed to use with or without technology. It is also important to provide the client with the time to process the information and help with interpretation if needed. Staff should also be prepared to accommodate and modify letters, mailings, phone calls, directions, forms

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<sup>17</sup> LD Online. (1992). Learning Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). [On-line] <http://www.ldonline.org/article/9733>.

<sup>18</sup> Payne, N. (2006). Peer TA Roundtable Presentation: Best Practices for ADA Service Accommodations.

<sup>19</sup> Payne, N. (2004) Roundtable Resource: Thoughts About Accommodations and Modifications

and applications. In the workplace, additional modifications may be required. For example, giving a person one job task at a time, allowing them extra time to complete an examination or placement test or providing a job coach to answer questions. Numerous accommodations such as these can be made, often at little to no cost.

For additional resources on job accommodations, visit the Job Accommodation Network sponsored by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor at <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>.

***Interagency Collaboration:***

One key for TANF participants with learning disabilities becoming self-sufficient is access to appropriate services and accommodations. For this to occur, programs should be linked together. In Puerto Rico, the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration (VRA) is the lead agency assisting individuals with disabilities in finding and maintaining jobs. The Puerto Rico Department of Vocational Services presented information on their referral process and the services they provide to TANF and other clients. There was consensus between the agencies that efforts would be made to enter into a written agreement that outlines how they will work together to meet the needs of TANF participants in Puerto Rico.

Overall, participants, speakers and facilitators agreed that the Roundtable was a success in assisting TANF service providers in understanding and supporting participants with learning disabilities. There was also significant discussion about needs for further training in this area and capacity building among caseworkers. There are very limited resources in Puerto Rico. This presents unique challenges to an island population which also faces transportation and terrain obstacles.

**APPENDIX A:**

**AGENDA**



**WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK  
IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING LEARNING DISABILITIES  
IN THE PUERTO RICAN TANF POPULATION  
San Juan, Puerto Rico  
June 7 & 8, 2007**



**DAY ONE – THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 2007**

**8:00 – 8:30 AM      Registration and Networking Session**

**8:30 – 8:45 AM      Welcome and Opening Remarks**

*Olga Bernardy, Auxiliary Administrator, TANF Program, Puerto Rico Department of the Family*

*Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network*

*Frank Ceruto, Program Specialist, ACF, Region II*

**8:45 – 10:30 AM      Understanding Learning Disabilities Part 1: Myths, Biases and Co-occurrence**

*Moderator: Nancie Payne - President and CEO, Payne Associates*

*Molly Vera - BSW, CDC – Erie County Medical Center*

*Jess Porras – Learning Disabilities Specialist, San Diego State University*

*Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections*

This presentation will focus on building a common understanding about what is a learning disability, how learning disabilities affect individuals and families, how myths and biases impede diagnoses and response, and the extent of co-occurrence with other challenges to self-sufficiency.

**10:30 – 10:45 AM      Break**

**10:45 – 11:30 PM      Understanding Learning Disabilities Part II: Identifying Key Attributes and Characteristics – Agency to Agency Collaboration**

*Moderator: Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections*

*Nancie Payne – President and CEO, Payne Associates*

*Speaker – Department of Vocational Rehabilitation*

This presentation focuses attention on the logistics related to accommodating the special needs of people with learning disabilities. The intent of this session is to begin to reinforce the goal of agencies working together for the common goal.

Nancie Payne will discuss tools designed to identify learning disabilities, engaging those

clients who may have slipped through the cracks and why, current methods for

agency to agency collaboration to serve this population effectively and how to obtain their buy-in for treatment options.

The Vocational Rehabilitation representative will discuss how they currently work with learning disabled individuals, to include assessments, collaboration of services, and long term prognosis and follow-up.

Department of the Family staff are given the opportunity to ask questions to clarify their understanding of this session's materials.

Research and resource material will be provided that will aid all of the participants in addressing the disability with the client.

**11:30 – 12:45 PM      *Serving Clients with Learning Disabilities: The Puerto Rico Caseworker Perspective***

*Moderator: Olga Bernardy - Auxiliary Administrator, Development of the Family*

*Norma Santiago – Program Coordinator, Camden Area Health Education Center*

This session will address specific outreach and training techniques for caseworkers. They will receive skill building techniques designed to identify behaviors that signal potential learning disabilities. Special emphasis will be placed upon avoiding labeling and stereotyping clients when certain behaviors are observed.

**12:45 – 2:30 PM      *Screening for Learning Disabilities***

*Facilitator: Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections*  
*Speaker - Department of Vocational Rehabilitation*

*Respondent Panel:*

*Jess Porras – Learning Disabilities Specialist, San Diego State University*

*Molly Vera - BSW, CDC – Erie County Medical Center*

*Nancie Payne – President & CEO Payne and Associates*

This session will begin by a discussion of the trials and tribulations currently faced by case managers in attempting to work with the hard to serve TANF/C population. Case managers require a more definitive method of determining: 1) if they are addressing a learning disabled individual, 2) what screening tools are available to pinpoint a disability, and 3) how to partner with agencies with the specific knowledge to help the client address the learning disability

The session will also provide an overview of available screening methods and techniques.

**2:30 – 2:45 PM      *BREAK***

**2:45 – 4:45 PM**

**After the Assessment: Strategies for Responding to Learning Disability Screenings**

*Molly Vera – BSW, CDC – Erie County Medical Center.*

*Nancie Payne – President & CEO Payne and Associates*

*Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections*

*Daylan Beamon – Business Development Manager, Business Access*

*Respondent Panel:*

*Speaker – Department of Vocational Rehabilitation*

*Olga Bernardy – Auxiliary Administrator - Department of the Family*

What assessment tools are currently used or have been developed to identify learning disabilities? What are the steps taken when a person is formally diagnosed with a learning disability? How are labeling and stereotyping addressed, while still encouraging clients to accept help for the identified disability? How does the learning disability affect the client's ability to get a job? What is the level of interaction the case manager should display toward the client if a learning disability is suspected? What is the role of Vocational Rehabilitation in responding to the case manager's request for assistance?

This session also features a web presentation from Business Access that will showcase the benefits of an in-home learning system tool designed to enhance TANF/C participation for those with learning disabilities.

An in-depth discussion of disability documentation and service coordination will wrap up this session. A clarification of agency roles will assist the individual to address the disability and how the disability impacts the client's ability to seek employment to satisfy WorkFirst requirements.

**4:45 – 5:00 PM**

**Day 1 Wrap-up & Day 2 Preview**

*Welfare Peer TA Network Staff*

*Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network*

This session will conclude Day 1 and introduce the activities for Day 2. Action planning exercises will be introduced. Participants are encouraged to consider the questions posed on the action planning materials as they listen to the presentations of Day 2.

## **DAY TWO –FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2007**

**8:30 – 9:00 AM      Networking Session**

**9:00 – 10:45 AM      Working with Learning Disability Partners**

*Speaker - Department of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Olga Bernardy – Auxiliary Administrator, Department of the Family*

*Respondent Panel:  
Molly Vera, Director – BSW. CDC – Erie County Medical Center  
Nancie Payne – President & CEO Payne and Associates*

*Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections  
Jess Porras – Learning Disabilities Specialist, San Diego State University*

This session begins with a discussion of the relationship building efforts of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and The Department of the Family, to include current responsibilities and the need for additional collaborative efforts to assist the learning disabled population.

The panel will discuss strategies to include relationship building, the development of Memoranda of Understanding, sharing appropriate information, referral and follow-up techniques, staff training, WorkFirst activities and other collaborative efforts.

**10:45 – 12:00  
PM                      Peer-to-Peer Exchange**

*Moderator: Norma Santiago, Program Coordinator, Camden Area Health Education Center*

*10:45 – 11:05*

Participants will break into groups of 10. Each group should determine 3 clarifying questions/comments/concerns to address to the panel in the next section of this session. Questions should not be repeated, allowing for the most comprehensive responses in the following session.

*11:05 – 12:00*

The clarifying questions developed during the Peer-to-Peer session will be presented to the panel for discussion.

*Respondent Panel:  
Speaker - Department of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Olga Bernardy – Auxiliary Administrator, Department of the Family  
Nancie Payne – President & CEO Payne and Associates  
Martha Chavis – Executive Director, Camden Community Connections,  
Jess Porras – Learning Disabilities Specialist, San Diego State University*

**12:15 – 2:30 PM    Action Planning**

*Moderator – Molly Vera, BSW, CDC – Erie County Medical Center*

The Action Planning session will focus on the peer-to-peer exchange, panel discussion to assist the Department of The Family with specific implementation goals. In addition, this session will focus on identifying and reaching out to a broad array of potential partners – including those not present at the Roundtable. This session will also provide an overview of how the Welfare Peer TA Website can provide ongoing support for action planning and to identify additional resources to address and/or respond to Learning Disabilities in the TANF/C population.

**2:30 – 2:45 PM    Closing Remarks & Evaluation**

*Lisa Washington-Thomas, Federal Project Officer, Welfare Peer TA Network  
Jacqueline Thomas, Project Director, Welfare Peer TA Network*

**APPENDIX B:**  
**PARTICIPANT LIST**



# WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

*Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Puerto Rican TANF/C Population*

*San Juan, Puerto Rico*

*June 7 & 8, 2007*



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# WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

## *Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Puerto Rican TANF/C Population*



*San Juan, Puerto Rico*

*June 7 & 8, 2007*

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# WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK

*Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Puerto Rican TANF/C Population*

*San Juan, Puerto Rico*

*June 7 & 8, 2007*



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**APPENDIX C:**  
**EVALUATION SUMMARY**



# Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network

Sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families

## Evaluation Summary

*Identifying and Addressing Learning Disabilities in the Puerto Rican TANF Population*

San Juan, Puerto Rico

June 7 - 8, 2007

1. Peer TA Staff handled the logistics, arrangements, and scheduling of the event in a timely and competent manner.

Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5	Average Score
0	1	3	22	95	<b>4.74</b>

2. Peer TA staff prepared me for the meeting by providing clear communication regarding the meeting's agenda and purpose.

Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5	Average Score
1	0	4	28	90	<b>4.75</b>

3. The speakers had valuable information to share, and were thorough in the subject areas presented.

Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5	Average Score
0	0	6	34	82	<b>4.52</b>

4. The speakers engaged the audience effectively and facilitated interactive discussions.

Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5	Average Score
0	1	13	30	78	<b>4.52</b>

5. The information presented and shared will be useful in improving outcomes for TANF child-only cases.

Strongly Disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly Agree 5	Average Score
0	1	15	36	69	<b>4.39</b>

6. What did you find most useful about attending this roundtable (i.e. any immediate or long-term benefits to you/your staff that you anticipate as a result of attending this roundtable)?

- Learning to recognize that there are other causes of our participants' limitations that should be considered during case management.
- Learning how Vocational Rehabilitation functions. And taking the experiences of each of the Peer TA panel members and applying them to my work. We learned something new everyday to help us work better with our participants.
- Knowing that there are more opportunities for appropriate placement that I can offer to participants with learning disabilities.
- Learning that there are effective techniques for detecting learning disabilities.
- Being able to understand the participant better so that I can be more effective when counseling and seeking appropriate resources.
- Knowing the services Vocational Rehabilitation offers.
- It was very interesting and it clarified many of my doubts about the issue.
- Hearing Vocational Rehabilitation's commitment to the program. Although we have referred cases and have not seen any action, we are confident that this will be resolved.
- Discussing screening methods and the appropriate way to treat a participant when we suspect they may suffer from a learning disability.
- Personally, this has helped me recognize the difficulties faced by close relatives and from today forward I can wrestle with their situation.
- Learning how to identify learning disabilities. Since we face similar situations daily, we can now manage the situation better and advocate for our participants.
- Having staff from Vocational Rehabilitation present during the conference who were willing to answer our questions in a professional way. Excellent networking/resource ability accessible during the conference and brainstorming.
- Knowing that TANF recognizes that there are participants with real limitations that impact their socio-economic development. Being part of a proactive movement to improve the program's services.
- Refreshing prior knowledge in order to develop an initial interview and effective employability plan. Now I will observe with more detail, thanks to the tools offered, before attempting to place a participant with these or other conditions.
- Creating more awareness about learning disabilities since I observe them, but did not understand them. Now I understand them better and can seek alternatives. Understanding the profile of the condition.
- I have always believed that we should be more compassionate with clients and this workshop has helped us to understand them better.
- Learning about the reality of some participants.
- The information presented gives us a very useful framework for learning disabilities to consider with the cases we evaluate daily. Many helpful tools for follow-up.
- The conference was very useful in that now, during client interviews, we can more quickly identify when someone may have a problem. We can then identify the resources to work with that client.
- I think L.D. could be the answer to the questions, "why are so many participants

labeled ‘hard to serve’ without any specific reason?” and, “why is retention so difficult after placement?” Now there seems to be a bit of light shed and new perspective that motivates us to know that we won’t be alone in this fight to eliminate barriers for participants with L.D.

- Creating awareness of the learning disabilities affecting our clients.
- This will help us try to understand the participants better.
- I can better evaluate participants that come to my office and better serve them.
- Learning about L.D.
- Although it will be a long process, I hope there will be a relationship between case management and vocational rehabilitation as we both hope to resolve, in part, the difficulties faced by clients with learning disabilities.
- Learning about learning disabilities, particularly dyscalculia and dyslexia. Learning that there are neurological disabilities as well as physical disabilities.
- This has helped me to understand the client more. It was very helpful to get a better grasp of learning disabilities.
- More coordination with other agencies.
- As a developer of employment, this was very helpful. I didn’t know very much about the topic. We can take this knowledge back to our local offices and share the techniques with those who have direct client contact.
- Strategies for working with clients.
- The creation of awareness among the group regarding learning disabilities that can affect our participants. And the emphasis on the need to join forces with other agencies to improve services to clients.
- Reinforcing knowledge about participants with disabilities.
- Thank you for this opportunity. It was very valuable professional development and it had great personal benefit as well. I hope it will be the beginning of communication and service delivery with Vocational Rehabilitation.
- The advice to put ourselves in our clients’ shoes. And to be able to offer clients the services they need in a way that doesn’t adversely affect the program.
- The orientation to Vocational Rehabilitation and its requirements.
- The information about how to discuss a potential disability with a client, and creating awareness about the situation.
- Identification of learning disabilities, which is key to the personal and professional development of participants.
- The network of help that we should create.
- The importance of creating awareness about the magnitude of the consequences of learning disabilities and how to identify them in our participants in a way that allows for better services.
- Presented a problem that we were not aware of.
- This conference helped us to understand our participants and help them in various ways.
- Increased knowledge of learning disabilities and how to identify them.
- Broadening my knowledge of specific learning disabilities.
- Learning to identify individuals with learning disabilities in order to be able to know the best way to guide them towards economic self-sufficiency.
- Coordination between Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of the Family.
- The link between Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of the Family.
- Better understanding of the participants with learning disabilities and

- identifying the best strategies for reaching the ultimate goal – employment.
- This meeting was very beneficial. It provided information that we can use in our daily work.
  - Learning the tools that are used in other places, hearing shared experiences.
  - Learning to recognize when our participants may have a disability that stands in the way of them realizing their goals.
  - Having indicators that can help identify barriers due to learning disabilities in order to be able to help them develop in their studies and their work.
  - As a caseworker, it will be extremely useful to conduct self-evaluations and put ourselves in the shoes of our participants in order to give them our very best. The advice, in general, of each of the panelists and shared experiences helped me a lot.
  - The importance of caseworkers having a pool of resources and direct contacts at other agencies to facilitate client services.
  - Broadening my knowledge of characteristics of persons with learning disabilities and being able to understand their situation better.
  - How to make a brief evaluation and knowing how to help and refer the participant.
  - Close meeting between Vocational Rehabilitation and ADSEF; the information presented by the panelists; knowledge of the strategies used in other welfare states.
  - The steps for working with these individuals. This will help us identify those barriers and weaknesses and help us to work to convert them into strengths.
  - This made it easier to identify this type of participant. It is very important to add testimonies of cases that, perhaps, were difficult to show us how they were able to overcome those barriers.
  - The benefit will be long term, after solidifying agreements with the different resources in order to be able to make referrals of L.D. participants. The information was very useful and it can be shared with participants if and only if the participant accepts that she may be facing some barriers due to L.D.
  - The close, official coordination between Vocational Rehabilitation and case management which will give rise to a better relationship.
  - Having more information about participants with learning disabilities. Now we can better evaluate and refer participants to the resources they need.
  - Being able to identify learning disabilities in clients.
  - The future coordination with Vocational Rehabilitation
  - We were given tools so that our communication with clients can be more effective. They will help us identify participants with L.D. more effectively and quickly. This will effect how we are able to place them in successful employment.
  - Learning about learning disabilities, having some initial strategies to begin working with participants that present with problems for which we may need to intervene. It also helped me have a different perspective since the focus that we had been given was on placement and sanctioning those who didn't want to participate.
  - This gave more knowledge and education so that I can better serve my clients. Thank you very much.
  - Opening my eyes to other conditions that can affect the progress of our participants.

- It seemed that the topics focused on the characteristics to watch for to help me preliminarily identify a participant with a learning disability. In the long run I will receive the tools and develop the processes that will help clients receive the services to help them face their deficiencies and to be able to compete in the work force.
- Trying to understand and identify TANF participants with learning problems.
- I realized ways that I can continue to improve service to our participants. I tools begin to help.
- The innovative information on the topics presented, the examples and the agreements between agencies were very valuable.
- The information about learning disabilities and how to identify resources in the community.
- The experiences, anecdotes and shared knowledge from the Peer TA panel. The information offered by Vocational Rehabilitation.
- With all that was learned and discussed, one can attend to the clients, especially those that have been sanctioned, in a better way now that I understand that the majority of sanctioned participants have learning disabilities.
- Having more empathy and being more perceptive of the limitations of participants.
- The different agreements between agencies that will work to our clients' benefit.
- Learning about Vocational Rehabilitation and how they interact with case management.
- Learning about Vocational Rehabilitation services for our clients. Knowing the types of leaning disabilities that exist to be able to identify them and help the client gain economic independence by overcoming barriers and strengthening abilities.
- Being able to identify some learning disabilities in our participants and being able to help and understand them. Now I can understand some of my participants and coworkers that I thought were slow learners and now I know they have learning disabilities.
- A better understanding of the majority of our clientele. A beginning of seeing our clients from a different point of view.
- Identifying the possible signs a learning disabled person might present and being able too work with individuals at their own pace. Highlighting the strengths, ushering them to success using the same.
- The written information that I can use with my participants for screening and the assistance with identifying the resources, agencies and professionals.
- Learning how to grasp the needs of the participant when they have learning disabilities y knowing that there are alternatives to help them.
- Learning how to identify limitations in order to convert them into strengths.
- Encouragement to put ourselves in our participants' shoes. This will help improve the processes.
- It is very helpful for me to know that we can work with participants with this type of situation, with the support of the program.
- The training provided very important tools that will help case managers identify learning disabilities.
- Receiving the tools and resources to be able to work with participants with different types of learning disabilities.
- The most useful part of this training was receiving tools to be able to work with

participants with learning disabilities. Although we won't be working directly with these problems, at least we will be aware of when something is wrong with the participant and can refer them, understanding that they need specialized help.

- Alternatives for identifying problems that may present in my participants.
- The screen presented by Molly Vera is a great tool for identifying learning disabilities.
- Knowing that we are finally making inroads with Vocational Rehabilitation which now seems like a viable alternative for our clientele.
- Establishing a support network, visiting other agencies and putting myself in the place of the participant. Working with the participant to find their strengths and guiding them along that path.
- Being able to understand the causes and effects of the participants.
- Learning to be more attentive to how the participant expresses herself, moves, etc. in order to evaluate the possibility of a learning disability and the different agencies to help her have a better quality of life.
- The possible alternatives there are to identify participants with learning disabilities.
- Hoping for long term direct integration of the agencies with our TANF program in order to obtain effective results. They already experience a number of social problems.
- I learned that we may not always reach our goal, but if we make it half-way, there has been a change. Learning to see another perspective while working.
- Being able to identify participants with learning disabilities.

7. About what issues would you like to have had more discussion at the roundtable?

- Methods we can use in the office to work with participants with LD.
- Mental health problems.
- Real alternatives in the area of education and training.
- More concrete examples of success with other programs. And after benefits have ended, is there any follow-up offered to the client who apparently reached self-sufficiency?
- The benefits that referred clients receive and follow-up to clients placed in training or jobs.
- More examples on identifying learning disabilities.
- I would have liked to have heard more about facilitating the link between the different agencies.
- I am worried about the uninformed employers who don't adjust to the reality of our participants. Educating the public and creating buy-in will make for a better country.
- Inter-agency collaboration
- How to cope with LD in each participant
- Tools that can be used in PR since the reality here is different than in the States. There are more economic resources and agencies there that don't exist in PR.
- Difficulty with HIV positive clients with LD.
- Alternative job placements for LD participants. Available agencies and employers.
- Ways to evaluate my participants. The process of agency to agency integration.

- How to help LD participants directly.
- Measurement tools that exist for participants with LD.
- More information on LD and assessments.
- LD evaluations (theory and practice).
- The way participants are motivated is not adequate. We should teach the majority of the participants to be self-motivated and not to act because they will be compensate.
- Barriers between the case manager and other government agencies.
- Barriers that case managers face from day to day: workplace issues, internet access, employment pages.
- Where we can send participants for evaluation, help and guidance towards employment.
- Situations with their alternatives.
- Despite this being a training that focused on services offered in the United States, it would have been ideal to have had a few collaborative agreements between the agencies that would be helpful at this time, i.e. Department of education, that could help us elevate the level of education of our clientele, literacy and research information.
- More elaboration on the different learning disabilities and their characteristics.
- Coordination with other agencies and strategies for placing participants with A.D.H.D.
- I am most interested in how to benefit form other agencies, and how to have the most effective and timely cooperation. I understand that we can make contacts, but it would be better to have support to work together.
- How is Vocational Rehabilitation going to work with our referrals from now on? Will our clients be given priority?
- Real alternatives to help the participants in Puerto Rico given the set of problems the country faces.
- LD diagnosis. Information related to the medical condition.
- Strategies for working in men's and women's groups of participants with LD.
- Professional strategies to use as examples.
- Diagnostic test for each learning disability, how to administer them, how to develop a plan of action after administering the test.
- More examples. It would have been helpful to have had more real cases as examples for us, like the ones offered by Norma Santiago.
- Vocational Rehabilitation should have had more time for their presentation so that we could better understand the process they follow.
- Similarities and differences between client sanctions in the panelists' experiences and our own.
- Differences between learning disabilities and mental retardation.
- More strategies from the speakers, or more detail on case management process with more examples and forms that they use in the process.
- More examples of effective methods that have been used with persons with LD
- I would like to know more specific details about the services Vocational Rehabilitation provides to customers.
- Places to help meet these individuals' needs.
- How to manage participants who don't accept their weaknesses.
- How to do more work in the time given. How to correctly divide time so that the administrative work can be completed as well as case management.

- **Management strategies**
- **The issue of high volume of participants with LD that the program usually sanctions. The difficult bureaucracy in Puerto Rican agencies.**
- **Different treatment options for psychological problems.**
- **Techniques for getting clients to open up to case managers.**
- **The different learning disorders and how they manifest.**
- **Ways to serve participants with specific learning disabilities**
- **How to coordinate referrals to VR and ways to work with the LD population given the reality in Puerto Rico among the different agencies.**
- **More information on the characteristics of LD.**
- **Organizational psychology – when a client is placed in employment, how to retain employment and be productive.**
- **Developmental differences that affect participants.**
- **More tools to detect LD.**
- **How can we, with an accessible and easy to use tool, “identify” a possible participant in the TANF program who suffers from LD?**
- **What tools used in the US can be implemented by the federal government in PR?**
- **Placement alternatives**
- **How do case managers work in the US in order to be able to give so many services? Is it possible that there, in addition to having more resources, there is more personnel and smaller case loads? Here we have between 70 and 130 cases per caseworker and we have to do administrative work as well, as we don’t have secretaries or assistants.**
- **A workshop on how to strengthen the strengths while working on the barriers, for the success of the client.**
- **How many cases are there in the US? Is there a required placement rate? Because as I understand it, sending a participant for services doesn’t count as placement.**
- **What part of the brain is affected when one has LD? What causes it?**
- **Diversity and management of other cultures.**
- **Examples of cases the speakers have worked with during their experiences.**
- **As a developer of employment, I want to know how to set participants on a path to employment in a place where they will feel accepted, even with their LD.**
- **The issue of participants with criminal backgrounds that make finding employment difficult.**
- **Problems with drug and alcohol addiction.**
- **ADHD**
- **Resources for these clients and programs in which they can be successful.**
- **How can we think of adding the prospect of coordination of services in the TANF program? Specific procedures to follow up with clients with LD.**
- **I realize time was limited, but I would have liked to have learned more about the diagnoses of LD.**
- **Neuropsychological services**
- **The approach toward our clients with different cultures; making them feel welcome to the program; language barriers.**
- **Identification and agreements for services.**
- **Methods of identification**
- **Psychometric tests, correlations between the symptoms and behaviors prevalent among persons with LD with other related disorders. The specific measures**

- taken by each panelist to meet the client's needs while waiting for specialized services to materialize. Statistics about the success of interventions in specialized employees.
- Neuropsychological problems and alternatives.
- It would be very helpful to know more specifically the referral process for VR.
- How to decide upon common strategies
- Some questions that are indicative of LD

8. On which aspects of serving Puerto Rican TANF/C clients would you like to receive additional technical assistance?

- Many participants, in rural areas have transportation problems. They would like to participate, but usually don't continue after 3 months or that take just any placement and don't succeed.
- Being able to identify existing problems, obtain additional resources, and that we arrive at agency integration.
- The chance for agencies that over direct services to get to know what each other offers to avoid duplicity, and whether or not any collaborative agreements have been reached.
- How will TANF and VR "divide" clients? For example, if a participant is referred to VR, are they still a TANF client? How will there be satisfactory placement if they are going to VR once a week?
- Real alternatives so that those placed in experience or service can complete their hours afterwards. Since May, June and July there are no basic education classes beginning and this limits placement.
- They need closer alternatives (educational institutions) to reach their educational goals and complete high school.
- How do we offer services to individuals who live far from urban areas and don't have transportation?
- The biggest problem for rural clients is transportation. It makes it very difficult for them to comply with the program.
- Issues should be discussed more in depth, depression among others.
- The computer course option is more developed than our current capacity.
- I would like you to name an entity that provides assistance to individuals with learning disabilities.
- I would like to see, at least, a 2 week computer course offered. There are lots of reports to be done, which assumes that we all are familiar with computers, which is not the case. We would be able to do the work more quickly and have more time to devote to the clients.
- More about the tools to reach the goals. Since there are so many needs, but when we try to move forward we run into so much bureaucracy among government entities.
- Placement techniques
- Transportation makes it very difficult for these individuals to attend workshops and trainings. What kind of help can be offered to prepare them for work with this barrier?
- Personally, I work with participants that live in distant rural areas. This is a problem when it comes to placement because they don't have transportation. The assistance that is needed is resources to mobilize these hard to reach areas to offer services there and find closer jobs where they can earn a living. PR has a high unemployment rate and it is much higher in these areas. The government should concentrate more on these areas and create jobs there.
- Often participants in rural areas do come to appointments and are never placed because of serious transportation issues. They live in hard to access areas where there is no public transportation. As a result they miss appointments and work. We need better

- transportation solutions.**
- **Interviewing methods.**
  - **High school equivalency acquisition.**
  - **Workshops to peak the curiosity of participants about investments.**
  - **Accessibility of services**
  - **Learning to evaluate cases that appear to be LD cases.**
  - **More information on mental illness.**
  - **Create a web page that puts us in touch with employers for job placement.**
  - **Transportation and child care.**
  - **Psychological help to assist in managing internal conflicts.**
  - **Limited public transportation, better jobs or creation of jobs**
  - **A change in attitude towards hard to serve clients.**
  - **Motivation. Priorities.**
  - **Create forms with simple tests that help us identify any LD and motivate the client to accept a referral for professional evaluation.**
  - **More information on the home learning system.**
  - **More about agencies that can help, public and private.**
  - **Computer classes.**
  - **Analysis of the very real transportation barrier in PR, and that this be analyzed with the agency that can provide more infrastructure to make it easier for individuals to get around.**
  - **Housing, employers and medical services**
  - **Placement and employers in rural areas. What alternatives are available for participants who live in rural areas without adequate transportation?**
  - **Attitude management, how to help participants understand that they have a responsibility and that they have to better themselves in order to improve their quality of life.**
  - **How to resolve the transportation problem in rural areas.**
  - **Training on self-esteem for participants**
  - **Public housing, VR, coordination of services between agencies.**
  - **Available resources in the region.**
  - **Emotional disorders, crisis management, crisis intervention**
  - **I would like to have more resources**
  - **Psychology, real help for my clients, GED, Job Corps in various locations on the island**
  - **Child care**
  - **How to help participants understand that they need to leave their children with someone else so that they can comply with case management. Suggestion: Put child care facilities in rural areas.**
  - **How to know of a participant has problems and how to combat them**
  - **Workshops on programs in the area of residence.**
  - **Literacy classes**
  - **I would like to receive more information and have more tools to be able to help my participants. We lack adequate offices, telephones and other necessary equipment to be able to help our clients. Technological assistance.**
  - **I would like to hear more about real alternatives given the problem of transportation and education.**
  - **Mental health services, education**
  - **More about transportation since in our country we don't have public transportation 24 hours a day.**
  - **Limitations in the areas of transportation and education.**
  - **Transportation and child care and limited job opportunities in rural areas.**

- How to get services to clients in these hard to reach areas.

9. Please share any overall comments regarding the program or the speakers, which you feel might be helpful in planning future programs.

- Everything was excellent. I am an individual with LD and now I am able to help others.
- The impact of social problems (domestic violence, poverty and mental health) in human conduct and how these issues affect decision making.
- Making connections with different government agencies that offer participants alternatives so that they can reach their goals and objectives.
- The panelists were superb, conveyed the message and were well prepared.
- I would have been useful for the panelist to relate experiences and successes after interventions.
- The reality of Puerto Rico, with regards to the resources and alternatives that the US has means that you can't compare our island. I was happy to learn that we need to look for other resources for about TANF clients. There is strength in unity. Communication and empathy with participants is very important.
- Come back.
- How to prepare and observe our participants in order to be able to refer them for services.
- I think you should offer these kinds of trainings much more often so that we can acquire the knowledge we need to better serve our clients.
- It is very important to have integration among various agencies to be able to offer appropriate services: VR, Education and Health.
- Although your suggestions are very effective, there characteristics and circumstances are not the same.
- It would be nice if you could provide some type of guide for us to serve our clients.
- Thank you very much for coming and sharing your knowledge here in Puerto Rico.
- I hope this type of workshop or training (and other topics pertinent to participant services) is presented more often. I understand that this one was a complete success and accomplished its purpose.
- This was really a well planned, well organized seminar that met the expectations of case management.
- Highly knowledgeable, experienced panelists. In the future, you should consider having a longer training in order to share your knowledge so that it can then be passed on to our clients.
- The excess of administrative work takes away time to focus on direct services and follow-up with participants.
- We need personnel who can offer workshops and psychological services to our participants. One psychologist per region who can attend to the participants' needs.
- Coordinating effectively with agencies. Managers traveling to other states, sharing information, learning about the work and equipment in other states.
- I understand that the speakers were very clear in all aspects. The message came across effectively. They were all very efficient.
- This was very useful to us.
- The presentations were excellent. Please consider the possibility of further presentations.
- I enjoyed all of the topics presented. They were presented in simple and concise language. Please consider future trainings.
- Future coordination with other agencies to facilitate the placement process.
- This has been a very enriching experience, a very professional, well organized

- presentation. Congratulations and I hope you return soon.
- It has been a pleasure to receive this information and to benefit from the experience of these professionals.
  - I hope the staff can be trained more often so that we can stay up to date with existing issues.
  - It was a brilliant idea to have the professionals in the field share their experience with us directly.
  - Department of Education-literacy programs, GED; Department of Health – should pay for LD screening; Department of Housing – should respect the collaborative agreement with Department of the family regarding Section 8.
  - The information given and discussed was excellent and certainly very pertinent. However, we all have to consider the fact that the cultural reality of Puerto Rico as a Latin territory is not the same as the cultural reality and resources of the mainland. Some strategies and work plans might function properly there, but that does not mean that the outcomes will be the same here in Puerto Rico and that is something we must not ignore.
  - Excellent. Very professional resources.
  - We should have these trainings more often to stay up to par. And it is important for panelist to be aware of our concerns with our population.
  - We need more workshops like this.
  - It is important to keep offering these types of trainings in various aspects of case management.
  - There should be coordination agencies like Dept. of Education and Housing to improve communication and offer better services.
  - The conference was excellent and there should be more.
  - This event was a success. It will help us improve services.
  - The event was great and the information was very helpful. I hope VR and Dept. of the Family do what they intend.
  - Placement and retention
  - The facility and the food were excellent. Some parts of the materials presented were helpful, others did not apply. There are tremendous differences between the experiences of the panelists and the locals in attendance.
  - It is very important to establish that the issues that TANF participants face in the continental U.S. are very different than those of the participants who reside on the island of Puerto Rico. We could begin with a discussion of living on a small over-populated island.
    - i. I want to congratulate you for not only having identified a problem, but also for fighting to find a solution. Thank you for visiting our small island and showing interest in helping us as a people, sharing your resources and experiences with us. Thank you.
    - ii. I know that although change will not happen quickly, this is a beginning to finding justice for those who suffer with LD who are often judged as lazy or stupid, when they are neither.
    - iii. It would be helpful if your personnel could spend at least 6 months with us in order to better understand the reality of our system and the true needs of our participants. In other words, put yourselves in our shoes. Ha ha ha.
  - More motivational discussions and tools or programs from the US that we can implement in PR.
  - I would like to have this kind of conference annually so that I can stay up to date with my career.
  - The conference was very good, but in PR there are not as many resources our jobs. There are problems with the employability plan. How are we to place 50%? We end up losing a participant in the first job that becomes available, even when that is not in line

with their occupational goals.

- The conference was very interesting and relevant to the reality we face, day to day, with our participants.
- We need training on the employability plan.
- We don't have necessary tools and resources.
- Bring the government's point of view into these agreements between agencies.
- I wonder if there are local resources who know the clientele who could present the information without the language barriers.
- This is useful information, but now, in order to be successful, it is in your hands to acquire the tools that the agency provides, like the collaborative agreement with VR.
- This conference will help us manage placements more carefully and offer the participant the opportunity to reveal these difficulties.
- Well done on the part of the panelists.
- We need the support of government agencies.
- It would be helpful for questions to be written on cards and given to the panelist. That way they can decide which questions are appropriate to answer and which ones are off topic.
- The workshops should be more interactive. That would help with the inattentiveness.
- This was excellent, but I would like to know how can the program work with VR or similar programs, like SER of Puerto Rico, for example?
- I learned a lot. Thank you for sharing your experiences and knowledge. This information will help me offer the best possible service to my participants and give them the best guidance towards their goals. This surpassed my expectations.
- Excellent conference!! This was helpful both personally and professionally. The topic was well developed over the two days and very organized. Although the information was varied it was complete. Excellent!!
- Excellent conference. It might help to break up this conference into 3 or 4 days due to so much valuable information. Excellent information was shared.
- Train personnel to work with this population.
- I was fascinated by the expertise of the panelists. With regards to the somewhat hostile interventions with clients, I should draw your attention to the fact that discrimination and rude treatment exist. It would be helpful to use case managers, job developers and supervisors from different areas (i.e., their clients are from the same neighborhoods) to implement the changes in the program. We are drowning in administrative tasks. We need training on the ADA and Microsoft Office programs.
- More emphasis on "oneness". Mrs. Martha Chavis is an excellent resource.
- There were things presented that do not apply Puerto Rico, at least not to the current Puerto Rico. Some of the suggestions just do not fit our reality. It would be great to have training on the ADA, rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. Staff needs computer training.
- Thank you for the opportunity to share in this information. We would love to have more trainings that will, in turn, benefit our participants.
- This workshop has opened a new window to facilitate assistance to our clients.
- I believe each case manager has the responsibility of working individually with clients with the resources in their community. The panelists presented their program from the point of view of their standard of living and their culture. Although some were Hispanic, our culture is different. The technology and resources that they have are very different than ours. The presentations, therefore, should be tempered to reflect our reality to address learning disabilities in our population.
- I would like to see videos of success stories. Technology is a helpful tool to create awareness among case managers and job developers. It's important to see that the work that we do is not in vain and to see that there are reasons to say, "You can do it."

- **Conference with a psychologist where the focus is on alternatives and management of persons with learning disabilities as well as emotional disorders.**
- **There has to be coordination among all of the relevant government agencies in order to appropriately serve this population.**
- **What alternatives does VR provide for a participant, who has been approved to receive the benefits of their agency, to help when they are placed in a community service or study situation? Are there other trainings in addition to GED? English, computer classes? Other classes that are in accordance with their employability plan?**