



THE CHOICE GROUP

# choices & Challenges

## Tips and Information

### Winter Weather

#### Driving Tips

#### **Necessary Equipment**

An emergency situation on the road can arise at any time and you must be prepared. In addition to making sure you have a safely-operable automobile, full tank of gas, and fresh anti-freeze, you should carry the following items in your trunk:

- Properly inflated spare tire, wheel wrench, and tripod-type jack
- Shovel
- Jumper cables
- Tow and tire chains
- Bag of salt or cat litter
- Tool kit

#### **Essential Supplies**

Be prepared with a "survival kit" that should always remain in the car. Replenish supplies after each use. Essential supplies include:

- Working flashlight and extra batteries
- Reflective triangles and brightly-colored cloth
- Compass
- First aid kit
- Exterior windshield cleaner
- Ice scraper and snow brush
- Wooden stick matches in a waterproof container
- Scissors and string/cord
- Non-perishable, high-energy foods like unsalted canned nuts, dried fruits, and hard candy.

## General Assembly Updates: Advocating for LTESS Funds

In January, representatives from across the Commonwealth gathered in Richmond for the annual General Assembly. On the legislative agenda this year are several bills and proposals that have a direct and negative impact on individuals with disabilities and employment services for these populations.

As The Commonwealth of Virginia, and the United States as a whole, recover from a devastating recession, Governor McDonnell has included a proposal to cut LTESS and ESS dollars by \$200,000 in this fiscal year and \$298,000 in the next. These dollars are used to serve individuals with disabilities so that they may maintain stability in the workplace. Already, since 2008, LTESS and EES dollars have been reduced by \$2,032,421 which can be translated to an elimination of services to over 2,000 individuals. With the proposed cuts, an additional 498 individuals will be effected.

LTESS dollars are of vital importance to helping maintain employment for individuals with disabilities. To put the above figures into perspective, with every one LTESS dollar spent on services, \$3.50 are earned. This earned income is then put back into the local economy.

Also in January, representative from The Choice Group, vaACCSES, and Virginia APSE gathered at the General Assembly to urge legislators to support individuals with disabilities. Some of the issues raised were



restoring a 5% cut in the waiver rates for fiscal year 2012. These cuts directly effect service providers and their ability to offer supports, with a further impact of limiting access of services to families in need. Additionally, legislators are urged to restore the 66% cut from the budget for Home and Community Based Service (HCBS) Waivers.

These are just some of the issues being considered by the General Assembly. For more information, please consult vaACCESS ([www.vaaccses.org](http://www.vaaccses.org)) or Virginia APSE (<http://www.va-apse.org>). You can also contact your representatives directly to voice your concerns and offer support for individuals with disabilities.

- Richard Lucyshyn

In addition, if you are driving long distances under cold, snowy, and icy conditions, you should also carry supplies to keep you warm such as heavy woolen mittens, socks, a cap and blankets.

#### **Weather**

At any temperature -- 20° Fahrenheit below zero or 90° Fahrenheit above -- the weather can affect road and driving conditions, posing serious potential problems. It is important to monitor forecasts on the Web, radio, TV, cable weather channel, or in the daily papers.

#### **Your Car**

Prepare your car for winter. Start with a checkup that includes:

- Checking the ignition, brakes, wiring, hoses and fan belts.
- Changing and adjusting the spark plugs.
- Checking the air, fuel and emission filters, and the PCV valve.
- Inspecting the distributor.
- Checking the battery.
- Checking the tires for air, sidewall wear and tread depth.
- Checking antifreeze levels and the freeze line.

Your car should have a tune-up (check the owner's manual for the recommended interval) to ensure optimal gas mileage, quicker starts, and faster response on pick-up and passing power.

It's helpful to practice winter driving techniques in a snowy, open parking lot, so that you're familiar with how your car handles. See your owner's manual for tips.

## The Choice Group Joins Project SEARCH

The Choice Group is pleased to be a part of Virginia's Project SEARCH program, a successful transition program that was originally founded at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in 1996. Project SEARCH is a unique, one-year, school-to-work internship for 18 to 22 year old students that takes place entirely at a host worksite. There are over 140 Project SEARCH sites in 42 states, the UK and Australia. This year, The Choice Group joined Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) in being a part of Virginia's Project SEARCH collaboration between Hampton, Newport News and Williamsburg public schools, and Sentara Hospitals.

Project SEARCH's total workplace immersion facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and on-the-job training and support through internships or worksite rotations. The goal for each student participant is competitive employment. The program provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent living skills to help youths with significant disabilities make successful transitions from school to productive adult life. The Project SEARCH model involves an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from teachers, job coaches, and employers. As a result, at the completion of the training program, students with significant intellectual disabilities are placed in nontraditional, complex and rewarding jobs.

The Choice Group provides job site training and job development services to twelve students in the Hampton program, and nine students in the Williamsburg program. Each student participates in three rotations of different jobs throughout the school year



Project | SEARCH

in positions such as inpatient rehabilitation technicians, outpatient rehabilitation technicians, operating room attendants, food services workers, patient transporters, maintenance, and security workers, etc. The Choice Group job coaches plan to have all students placed in competitive employment positions by program completion at the end of the year. Two students from the Williamsburg area have already been placed into positions- one as an operating room technician and one as a food service worker. The Choice Group services are individualized per student; job coaches provide job site analysis, checklists for students, task analysis, help teach different job site training skills, reinforce soft skills and help communicate classroom strategies in order to help students through their successful journey in the program. After an exciting and successful year, The Choice Group looks forward to being a part of the Project SEARCH program next year and working with a new group of students, while watching program graduates begin their new careers.

- Jenny Lange

## Transportation Updates

### CARE Tickets

GRTC's specialized transportation server, CARE, is now offering ten ticket books. The new books are currently available at these locations:

### Martin's Supermarkets

5700 Brook Road  
7129 Staples Mill Road  
3522 West Cary Street  
9645 West Broad Street  
4591 South Laburnum  
12601 Jefferson Davis Highway  
13700 Hull Street Road  
11361 Midlothian Turnpike

### CVS

13180 Midlothian Turnpike

### Kroger's Supermarkets

901 North Lombardy Street  
1601 Willow Lawn Drive

### Pick Market, Inc.

16 East Broad Street

### RideFinders

1111 East Main Street

### GRTC Headquarters

301 East Belt Boulevard

You can still purchase your Six Ticket CARE books at your usual location.

## Client of the Quarter



With each issue, The Choice Group seeks to spotlight clients as recognition for their success in the workplace. This month, we would like to recognize Ruth Young, an employee of a Richmond-area UHaul.

Ruth Young has been working at UHaul since May of 2005. Her beginning job duties included the basic cleaning of the storage units and checking locks. Over the years, Ruth has gained the responsibility of opening and closing up the building, landscaping, resealing floors in the inside units, and has even proven that she can run the front desk by herself when her bosses are away on vacation. She recently earned a 5 year pin for her service to UHaul and will

soon be spotlighted in the UHaul newsletter for her spectacular work and dedication to the company. She is known throughout the Richmond area for making the floors shine (like the top of the Chrysler Building!) and has even received bonuses as a result of her dedication and hard work. Ruth knows all the customers and her bosses (managers John and Linda Thomas) say that Ruth receives compliments all the time. In the 5 1/2 years Ruth has been there, she has gone through numerous managers. She has made smooth transitions with this and has helped train the new managers to learn the ins and outs of the business. Her current bosses have a great working relationship with Ruth and they look out for each other like family. Ruth is very proud of her successes at UHaul and enjoys working and the responsibilities that she takes on each year.

- Kellie Tucker

## Annual Awards Presented to Deserving TCG Employees

Choice Group employees braved cold weather and snowy conditions for the Annual In-Service, held on December 16th and 17th on the University of Richmond campus. The two-day meeting provided all employees of The Choice Group with valuable information and the opportunity for collaboration. In addition, annual awards were presented to selected individuals whose efforts and accomplishments were especially noticed and appreciated. Mrs. Robin Metcalf, President of The Choice Group, presented the awards. Mrs. Metcalf thanked all employees of the company for their hard work, dedication, and success and emphasized the value of each employee of the company. - Robyn Ritter

The following employee's were recognized for their specific contributions:

Erica Johnson – "Rookie of the Year"

Audra Mellott – "The Juggler Award"

Anna Hill – "The Stretch Award"

Sherman Gifford – "Makin' It Happen"

Heather Morrison – "Rookie Rock Star"

Algretta Pilgrim – "Volunteer Diva"

Adrea Robinson – "The Right Arm Award"

Sandy Dunaway – "Job Developer of the Year"

## Incarceration Facts

- Approximately 25,000 individuals will be released from incarceration in Virginia this year.
- 95% of all inmates will eventually be released.
- The average cost of incarceration is \$20,000 per individual, per year, not counting the cost of the family they leave behind.
- Research has proven that transitional services during the first weeks after release greatly reduce recidivism.
- Passages collaborates with state agencies, other nonprofits, the faith-based community and individuals.

## The Choice Group Recognizes Passages



The Choice Group is proud to recognize Passages, a newly formed non-profit organization, headed by William Poarch, which works to support the most vulnerable and underserved individuals as they pursue independence, meaningful employment, and community integration by accessing existing resources and developing essential services. Passages was incorporated and applied for nonprofit status in January 2009. It received its official 501(c)(3) determination from the Internal Revenue Service in March 2010 and became fully operational in July 2010. Passages' initial program concentrates on working with the ex-offender population, victims of domestic violence, and foster children aging out of the system. The services Passages provides include:

- Creating a Plan of Action
- Benefits
- Applying for Social Security
- Child Care
- Interview Clothing
- Obtaining a criminal history report
- Referral to the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS)
- Referral to the Department of Social Services (DSS)
- Education : Getting a GED, Attending School
- Employment : Assessments, Job readiness skills, Job placement & training
- Food: Food Bank, Applying for SNAP
- Finding Basic Furniture
- Health: Medical and Dental Care, Medications, Mental Health
- Housing: Independent, Recovery,

Transition, Virginia Supportive Housing

- Hygiene Products
- Obtaining Identification
- Skill training
- Transportation: Bus Passes, CARE Applications

Passages collaborates with a variety of community resources to provide these services. CARITAS is one such organization located in Richmond which, among other things, runs a furniture bank which helps to provide furniture to those who otherwise cannot afford it. Those who are referred to CARITAS by organizations like Passages, are eligible to receive all of the essentials to fully furnish their homes. These basic items help to make these transitional houses feel more like home.



Passages is a non-profit which runs exclusively on donations. Recently, it hosted a fund raiser by organizing a trip to the annual Tacky Light Tour in Richmond. Tickets sold out for this bus tour which traveled around the city to participating homes which go above and beyond to decorate for the holiday season. The tour stops along the way so that attendees can admire the wonderful tackiness of it all. Additionally, rentals at two beach houses were auctioned off for this coming summer season. All of this helped to raise \$3,600 for the organization. Passages is grateful to all who were involved. *(continued on next page)*

## The Choice Group Recognizes Passages (cont.)

If you are interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities, or if you would like to make a donation, please contact Billy Poarch at William.Poarch@mapofva.org, or 804-836-6347. All gifts are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law (Tax ID 26-411296). Passages is also currently looking for a volunteer who has a Masters of Social Work degree who would be interested in supervising graduate students for an internship program working with its clients. Please contact Mr. Poarch if you are interested. - Emily Muniz

### Contact Information:

William "Billy" Poarch  
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4807 Radford Ave., STE 104  
Richmond, VA 23230  
(804) 836-6347  
William.Poarch@mapofva.org

## Sandy Dunaway: Job Developer Extraordinaire

Most Vocational Counselors would agree that job development is one of the most difficult aspects of their work. Job development is the process of searching for, applying to, and securing employment for clients. Despite the many obstacles faced in performing this task, one Choice Group employee in particular has especially excelled in this area.

Sandy Dunaway has been a Choice Group employee for little over a year, but she has worked in the supported employment field for more than twenty-one years. She enjoys the job development aspect because it gives her the opportunity to be social and network with employers, while advocating for the importance of a diversified workplace. She finds great joy in informing a client of a scheduled interview and in helping them take additional steps toward independence.

Sandy attributes much of her success to sheer determination, a positive attitude, and the ability to educate employers regarding the benefits of supported employment. Her advice for other vocational counselors is to be persistent, positive, and knowledgeable. She advises fellow counselors to follow-up with employers and always smile, even while on the phone. Be confident in explaining the program and its benefits

to employers and know the client's interests, needs, and abilities well to find an appropriate job match that may even align with their hobbies.

Mrs. Dunaway has many great success stories, but the one that sticks out most in her mind is of a young lady with quadriplegia, the result of a car accident at the age of twelve. Sandy says, "When I met her I was able to see her smile, charm, and positive attitude." Although the individual expressed major doubts about her ability to obtain a job, Sandy was able to arrange employment at a restaurant as a greeter. The individual still works for that same employer, earning numerous awards for Employee of the Month, and she continues to receive compliments from customers, coworkers, and management.

For her hard work, commitment toward her clients, and continued success, Sandy recently received the Job Developer of the Year award at The Choice Group's Annual In-Service. Sandy's position has also recently changed, as she now solely performs job development tasks. Although she has only been an employee for The Choice Group for just over a year, her impact has been great and her success in job development is admired by all. - Robyn Ritter

## The Melting Pot Receives The Blue Ridge Region's 2010 Disability Employment Champions Award



The Choice Group would like to recognize The Melting Pot restaurant in Charlottesville, VA for their receipt of The Blue Ridge Region's 2010 Disability Employment Champions Award. These awards are given to employers statewide who exhibit outstanding business practices and support for employment of individuals with disabilities.

Choice Group Vocational Counselor Lisa Hart placed her first client at the Melting Pot three years ago. Manager Derek Bond was quickly impressed. Over the next three years, Mr. Bond went on to hire more employees with disabilities. Currently, there are seven individuals working in positions ranging from silverware roller and dishwasher to prep cook, server, and hospitality expert.

Mr. Bond states that his "experience working with people with disabilities has been overwhelmingly positive." These individuals have become integral members of his team, even going on to "assist with training new employees."

Mr. Bond is not the only one benefitting. Choice Group clients in his employ have gone on to say that they feel like they belong at the restaurant. One employee

states "I feel so comfortable at The Melting Pot. Derek teaches me so much about the restaurant. I told my job coach that this job is a dream come true."

Ms. Hart reports that Mr. Bond and his staff have been amazing, creating a supportive environment for individuals with disabilities to be employed. The restaurant has helped clients buy supplies when needed as well as providing a good venue for situational and long-term assessments.

In large part due to Mr. Bond's support of and success with supported employment, Richmond Vocational Counselor Emily Muniz was able to develop a working relationship with the Melting Pot restaurant in Richmond, VA. Chad Hornik had been impressed with the success his Charlottesville counterpart had experienced in working with The Choice Group and its clients. Thanks to this, Miss Muniz was able to place three clients who together have taken over the task of silverware rolling each day of the week. This arrangement has been beneficial to each of the three clients who are now gainfully employed, as well as to The Melting Pot who has been able to relieve its servers of this vital task so that they are able to concentrate on serving their guests and providing their well-known, outstanding service.

The Choice Group would again like to congratulate The Melting Pot, Mr. Bond, and his staff for their award. It is employers, clients, and relationships like these that help pave the way for success in the workplace for individuals with disabilities.

- Emily Muniz

## **Welcome New Employees!**

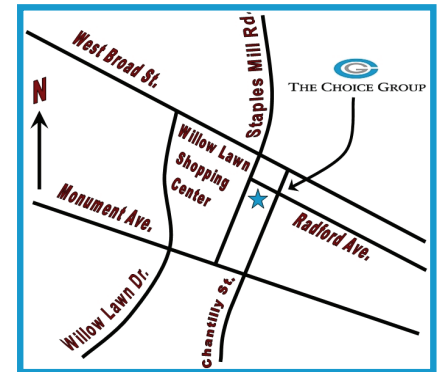
Krysta Johnson, Sarah Richardson, Michelle Smith, and Hannah Sizemore.



## **About The Choice Group**

The Choice Group was established in 1998 as a private rehabilitation and employment services organization. Please feel free to call us anytime at 877-374-5312. You may also visit us weekdays between the hours of 9:00 am and 4:30 pm. We have plenty of reference material for vocational counseling, resources for employers, and resources for people with disabilities, including pamphlets that further describe the extent of our services.

4807 Radford Ave., Suite 106 • Richmond, VA 23230 • [www.thechoicegroup.com](http://www.thechoicegroup.com)



## **CARF Accreditation**

The Choice Group received the highest accreditation available from CARF: a three year accreditation. We are proud of our entire staff for their contribution to attaining this award. This award makes it possible for our stakeholders to feel secure in the knowledge that they are receiving the best possible services from The Choice Group.

### **What is CARF?**

CARF is a nonprofit organization that accredits human services providers throughout the United States, Canada, and Western Europe in the areas of rehabilitation, employment, aging, and family services.

The mission of CARF is to promote the quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services through a consultative accreditation process that centers on enhancing the lives of the persons served.

### **What does it mean to be accredited?**

When the service or program you choose is CARF-accredited, it means your provider has passed an in-depth review of its services. It is your assurance that the provider meets rigorous CARF guidelines for service and quality -- a qualified endorsement that your provider conforms to nationally and internationally recognized service standards and is focused on delivering the most favorable results for you.

### **A hallmark of quality**

After an organization applies for accreditation of its services or programs, CARF sends professionals in the field to conduct an on-site survey to determine the degree to which the organization meets the standards. CARF surveyors also consult with staff members and offer suggestions for improving the quality of services.

CARF-accredited programs and services have demonstrated that they substantially meet internationally recognized standards. CARF accreditation means that you can be confident that an organization has made a commitment to continually enhance the quality of its services and programs and its focus on the satisfaction of the persons served.

### **The benefits of accreditation to the consumer of services**

Choosing CARF-accredited programs and services gives you the assurance that:

- \* The programs and services actively involve consumers in selecting, planning, and using services.
- \* The organization's programs and services have met consumer-focused, state-of-the-art national standards of performance.
- \* These standards were developed with the involvement and input of consumers.
- \* The organization is focused on assisting each consumer in achieving his or her chosen goals and outcomes.

## EMPLOYER PARTNERS

The Choice Group has partnered with a diverse and large segment of the business community. Our aim is to establish long term relationships with businesses in our community and we build these by providing employers with the support they need to obtain and maintain qualified, reliable, dependable employees. Our list of Employer Partners reads like the Who's Who in the Business Community. Listed below are some of the businesses that have hired our clients.

7-Eleven	Cybo Tech
A Touch of Care, Inc.	Deen Foods
A&E Service	Dept. of Taxation
A.G. Dillard	Department of Motor Vehicles
Able Couriers	Domino's Pizza
Advance Auto Parts	Double Tree Hotel
Auto Zone	EC. Link
All Dog Playskool	E.R. Carpenters
America House	Eastern Aluminum
American Family Fitness	Einstein (EOM)
American Security Group	England's Wood Stoves
Applebee's	Enterprise
Aramark. MCV	ESI, School of Business
Averett University	Family Care Home Health
Belle Kuisine	First North American National Bank
Beverly Healthcare	Food Lion
Big Lots	Geico
Bill's Barbeque	General Nutrition Center
Blue Ridge Mountain Sports	Glass Masters
Bon Secours	Gold's Gym
Breath of Life Landscaping	Golden Corral
Brighton Gardens	Goochland Custom Buildings and Play Center
Brooks Gray Sign Company	Goody Bicycle
Brown Toyota	Goody's
Burger King	Greyhound
Burrus Lamber	Hampton Inn
C. Digital	Hawkeye Manufacturing
Capitol One	Health Data Copiers
Cartaret Mortgage	Health South Rehabilitation Hospital
Cedarfield	Henrico County
Central VA Housing Coalition	Holiday Inn
Chesterfield County Disability Service Board	Holly Manor Nursing Home
Children's World	Home Depot
City of Richmond	Hopewell Craft
Civic Development Group	Howard Johnson
Comfort Inn	Hyatt Hotel
Computer Learning Solution	Ikon
Coyne Textile	Imperial Plaza
Creative Signs	ISS/Excel
Crutchfield	Ivy Hill Golf Club
Chester	Jackie's Hair Company
Crowne Plaza	James River Nurseries

The Jefferson Hotel  
Jo Ann Fabrics  
Keebler  
K-Mart  
Liberty University  
Longwood College  
Lowe's  
Lucy Corr Nursing Home  
Mail America  
Main Software Solutions  
Manpower  
Marriott  
Martha Jefferson Hospital  
McGraw GRP  
McDonald's  
MCV  
MCI World Communication  
Michael's  
Milhous Machine Company  
Monticello Area Community Action Agency  
Morehead Memorial Hospital  
Mrs. Marshall's  
Nabisco  
Office Max  
Old Dominion Box Company  
Old Dominion Health Services  
Omni Hotel  
Pegasus Cleaning  
Personal Touch Hair Design  
Pet Club  
Pet Smart  
Photowork Creative Camp  
Pizza Hut  
Porter Associates  
Printer Alley  
Quality Meats  
RC Drafting  
Radisson  
Rainbow Station  
Ramada Inn  
Regal Cinema  
Richmond Country Club  
Rose Department  
Rountree  
Ruby Tuesday's  
Ryan's Family Steakhouse  
SAS Plumbing  
Saint Catherine's  
Saint Christopher's  
Sam's Club  
Sea Ray  
Sears  
Service Master  
Shoney's  
Springs Industries  
Standard Parking  
Stanley Furniture  
Stanley Hardware  
Staples  
Stein Mart  
Strange's  
Super 8  
Target  
TEC Access  
Textilease  
The Boars Head Inn  
The Body Shop  
The Cedars  
The Goddards  
The Virginia Home  
Tour Time  
Trugreen Chemlawn  
Tyson Foods  
Ukrops, Midlothian  
University of Richmond  
University of Virginia Hospital  
University of Virginia Maintenance  
University of Virginia Observatory Hill  
Vanguard Plastics  
Virginia Baptist Hospital  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Virginia Correctional Enterprises  
Virginia Employment Commission  
Virginia Linens  
Virginia School of Technology  
Virginia State University  
Wachovia Bank  
Wal-Mart  
Wallace B. Tucker Mechanical Contractors  
Wendy's  
West End Orthopedic  
Westminster Canterbury  
Whitten Bros Mercury  
Wildbirds Unlimited  
Winn Dixie  
Wintergreen Resort  
Wolf Management  
YMCA  
YMCA Daycare  
World Access  
And many more...