Angela Lucas
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hireAbility
a non profit organization that matches qualified people with disabilities to job openings at no cost to employers or applicants.
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The original intent of the ADA was to open doors for people with disabilities who had been shut out as consumers, as passengers, as students and citizens and as employees.

The workplace, poses a significant challenge to the ADA. Here is an excerpt from a letter dated 2 years ago.

"I am a single, middle aged woman, and I have 3 years of college. I have many years experience as a legal secretary, and have really good typing skills as well as being a good speller. But, as soon as I started to have to use a *cane to walk*, because of my medical condition, I began to encounter all types of "discrimination" in the legal field, and in securing any type of employment, and was relegated into continuing in a low-paying position that put me in the bracket of the "working poor" in our country. Not making enough money to secure a place to live, any shelter, and was thus relegated to sleeping in my car."

"Annie" sought the services of a non-profit agency that promotes the "abilities" of people with disabilities. They strive to create partnerships with employers and dispel the myths that it is difficult and costly to recruit and employ a person with a disability. Because of this collaboration, "Annie" secured gainful employment. She wrote: "on my one year Anniversary, I again want to thank you for helping me to better my life's circumstances during a difficult journey, and to prove that I can be a productive and valued worker/employee."

A lot of progress has been made in the past two decades but there is more to be done. There are still a lot of "Annie's" unemployed and "sometimes the worst thing about having a disability is that people meet it before they meet you." A person with a disability is a person first and awareness is the first step towards change.

One of the biggest barriers that remain in our society is the attitude and misperceptions about people with disabilities. The perception has always been that people with disabilities aren't capable or productive. To undo that mindset is going to take longer than 20 years.

For Employers who need further information on The ADA:
Office of Disability Employment Policy
Voice 1-866-ODEP-DOL (633-7365) TTY 1-877-889-5627
www.dol.gov/odep

For job seekers:
http://www.disability.gov
or call your local New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services office.