

Part I:

Background Information

Telecommuter Case Study

BACKGROUND

Jamie Cahill was an active, people-oriented 27 year old in 1979. During this year she traveled with her husband, who was on the professional tennis circuit. While at Wimbledon, her leg suddenly went numb. The diagnosis: Multiple Sclerosis.

Jamie's enthusiasm for life and people continues in spite of her progressive loss of function. At first, it was inconceivable to her that she would spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair. The MS symptoms came and went, worsening with each reoccurrence. After the initial bout of numbness in her limbs and loss of balance, things actually returned to normal, and Jamie became pregnant with her first child. Exactly one year later, however, the numbness returned. After a second daughter was born to the Cahill's, Jamie strength waned further and she began using a wheelchair around the house.

She first lost all use of her legs, then her arms and hands. Jamie had a double major in speech therapy and education and she taught school for a year before joining her husband on his tour. With her daughters in school, she desperately wanted to return to work, primarily for the fulfillment of a professional career, but also to help with the financial burden her disability created.

After Jamie and her husband moved to Atlanta in 1990, she discovered the Shepherd Spinal Center and received extensive services, including new medication to help alleviate some of her fatigue, stiffness and other medical symptoms. A nutritionist designed an eating plan that would boost her energy. A vocational rehabilitation counselor completed a thorough evaluation and connected her with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, who ultimately enlisted the services of the Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA) at Georgia Tech.

FUNCTIONAL CAPACITIES/LIMITATIONS

Jamie is a wheelchair user and has the following functional capacities:

Cognition: Not affected.

Sensory: Eye fatigue which results in blurriness and decreased acuity.

Lower Extremity Function: No use of lower extremities.

Upper Extremity Function: No function of left upper extremity and minimal use of right arm and hand. She can slightly move her fingers in the right hand and can move this hand about four inches up from her lap. She is able to use a joystick to drive her wheelchair.

Speech: Voice becomes raspy and fatigued with use, especially when background noise is present.

Hearing: Not affected.

INITIAL JOB PLACEMENT

Jamie identified a position with Hartford Insurance Company that involved calling physicians' offices to follow up on the medical status of insurance claimants. Her vocational rehabilitation counselor asked the AT team at CATEA to evaluate her workstation and make recommendations for worksite accommodations.

Essential Functions of the Job

1. Review pertinent information from claim file and the questions identified by the claims examiner.
2. Send letter to physician with specific questions/issues identified by the claims examiner. Request telephone appointment.
3. Contact physician at specified time to review medical status of claimant.
4. Document conversation in claim file.
5. Send follow up letter to physician to review points covered during phone call and to request verification from physician that information is accurate.

Jamie requested AT to receive and handle files, compose letters, and access the phone. She held this position for two and one half years after which this position was eliminated. However, the AT used to perform these tasks was able to be transferred to her home office. Jamie resumed her job search and located her next position. CATEA was asked by her vocational rehabilitation counselor to help with independent living aides to enable her to be at home without attendant care during the day. The AT team was also asked to assist in the set up of her home office.

JOB DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT OCCUPATION

Jaime is employed by an independent research firm that conducts consumer research to evaluate and document the performance of home service providers, such as heating and air conditioning contractors, roofers and painters, and appliance repair. She interviews homeowners who have had experience with providers to determine quality contractors.

Essential Functions of the Job

1. Conduct phone interview with consumer.
2. Complete on-line form, documenting specific areas of quality and timeliness.
3. Sends form electronically to her employer.

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