

Bridges Across the Miles



February 24, 2004

Dear Colleagues:

As an educator, literacy tutor, trainer or program/service provider that has attended learning disabilities training(s), you have come to understand the struggle that adults with learning disabilities face in gaining the skills they need to lead productive, fulfilling lives. Through Florida's Bridges to Practice training initiative, Dr. Rochelle Kenyon, Project Director and myself, Practitioners' Points Newsletter Editor, we have sought to heighten awareness of serving adults with learning disabilities in literacy programs. Armed with knowledge of legal rights, program responsibilities, resources and supports, assistive technology, and innovative teaching tools and techniques, we sought to ask Bridges to Practice participants what impact this training had on their ability to provide services. It is our hope through this project, entitled, "***Bridges Across the Miles,***" that participants will come closer together to increasing collaboration between practitioners and program/service providers to improve the ways we serve this most underserved population of adult learners.

In order to provide some organization to this method of requesting feedback, the following four questions were sent to approximately 387 workshop participants.

1) How has training impacted student achievement in your classroom and/or in learners' daily lives with regard to learning disabilities? 2) What changes have you made in your instructional setting as a result of new information gained from the training(s)? (3) How has the *Bridges to Practice* training impacted on your awareness and ability to provide programs and services to adults with learning disabilities? and lastly, (4) What are some *Success Stories* you may have experienced with your students, or clients because of attending training on learning disabilities?

Participants' follow-up and feedback to these questions will be separated into the following categories: Volunteer Tutors/Trainers, ABE/GED/ESOL Practitioners, Adult Education Administrators, Corrections Practitioners, and State Service Providers. We anticipate that these responses are indicative of a much broader range of participants who implemented strategies although we are only able to feature those who responded to our questionnaire.

Meryl Eisenberg, Editor
Practitioners' Points

*Florida's Bridges to Practice Project
Focus on Adults with Learning Disabilities
<http://www.floridatechnet.org/bridges>
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Compiled by Meryl Eisenberg, Editor - Practitioners' Points
Florida's Bridges to Practice Quarterly Newsletter

"This is beginning to make sense to me now. Why hasn't anyone ever taught me this way before?" inquired the young boy to his literacy tutor. Her response was "Because they didn't know how. They didn't have the training it takes to teach people with processing problems." (Betsy Gauss, Lakes Wales Literacy Council Tutor and Tutor Trainer and ABE/GED Instructor)

Question # 1:

How has training impacted student achievement in your classroom and/or in learners' daily lives with regard to learning disabilities?

A. Volunteers/Tutors/Trainers

Betsy Gauss has been trained in the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching reading and has been using multisensory instruction for about 13 years with students of all ages. She has seen it make a tremendous difference in their learning. The child described above was exceptionally mature for his age and very motivated to learn. After 1½ years of tutoring, he is doing very well and on his own. "*Bridges to Practice training has reinforced my O-G training,*" says Betsy who is on the tutor training team for the Lakes Wales Literacy Council. Betsy is also an ABE/GED instructor for Polk County Adult Education. She finds it especially helpful to have knowledge about resources she can refer several of her ABE/GED students who may benefit from their services. Betsy likes having knowledge of new tools, like the *Reading Pen*, to use with some of her adult students.



Betsy Gauss



Gwen Sharp

Both **Gwen Sharp**, a tutor/trainer and **Mary de Kunffy**, a tutor/coordinator with the Clay County Literacy Coalition in Orange Park, Florida report that local tutors and trainers have become enthusiastic about information they've gained from *Bridges to Practice* training. Gwen conducts tutor training workshops for tutors who volunteer to work with people on a one-on-one basis. Based on *Bridges to Practice* training, Gwen has now included a section of her training on learning disabilities. Mary adds, "*Tutors are now better equipped to identify and work with people with learning disabilities as a result of this training.*"

Judi Rundel is an Assistant Librarian of the Franklin County Public Library and found the *Bridges to Practice* training to be an intense and comprehensive workshop that "*can only help to expand my relationship with the public.*"

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Suzanne Ensmann is the Program Effectiveness Specialist in the Adult Education program at Indian River Community College. She is also a member of the Professional Development Advisory Council for Region III and booked the *Bridges to Practice* training for their Vero Beach campus. Suzanne remarks, *"We have seen students achieve in their classrooms due to our teachers' commitment to serving these students and facilitating an environment that is conducive to learning."*

Donald VerHey is a substitute teacher at McKeel Academy in Lakeland and also works with homeless people as part of a church volunteer program. He plans to tutor either children or adults but feels that *"if I can teach reading to people with LD, I can teach it to people without LD."* Donald has become more informed as a result of the *Bridges to Practice* training and feels more confident in his abilities to provide or obtain the support his students may need.

B. ABE/GED/ESOL Instructors

"Just the reminder that between 50-80% of adults with low reading skills below the 5th – 7th grade may be learning disabled reminds us of the importance of recognizing signals of learning disabilities and adjusting daily lessons and strategies to better meet the needs of such students." (**Melissa Padgett**, ESOL instructor, Osceola County's Community High School Adult Learning Center, Kissimmee, Florida). Being an ESOL teacher, Melissa is trained in using ESOL teaching strategies that work well with most learning disabled students. She recognizes that ESOL as well as LD students can be auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners and that some students work better as individual learners while others are better group learners. *"Certainly understanding these facts have made me make adjustments to my teaching methods. I would say that both those with and without disabilities have responded well to the changes I have implemented, especially my hard of hearing students with moderate to profound hearing loss."*



Both **Jill Pancake** and **Evelyn Roldan** work at Osceola County's Community High School in Kissimmee, Florida. Jill runs the computer lab and has ESOL students, Levels 4 and 5, ABE, and GED students. Evelyn is a teacher aide for ABE/GED. Both Jill and Evelyn indicate that their students have increased their academic levels when there was recognition of a learning disability. Jill was able to make her students feel more secure while still identifying the areas of need. When the documentation of disability was obtained, the needed testing accommodations or additional assistance in their work schedules were provided.

Barbara West, Marsha Benton, and Audra Leverton work in the Success Center at Gulf Coast Community College (GCCC), Panama City, Florida. Both Barbara and Audra work in the GED Lab of the Passport Program at GCCC. *"In the Passport Program, students with learning disabilities receive a more targeted approach from the minute they declare a disability. Staff members attempt to determine usually through trial and error, the best format through which a student can learn more easily. By working with students to determine their individual learning needs, we are able to encourage the success of those students. During the 2002-03 school years, approximately 10% of our students who took the GED Tests and passed did so with approved accommodations such as extended testing time, private room, and breaks."*

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Marsha Benton is the English Learning Manager in the Success Center at Gulf Coast Community College and works with a variety of people - mostly college preparatory students, some of whom have identified themselves as learning disabled, many who have not. She does not work with a homogeneous group of people, like most adult programs, but tries to employ some LD strategies to enhance learning for all her students. *"At the beginning of the year, Study Skills workshops are offered to our college prep. students to help them determine what their dominant learning style(s) are and the value of knowing one's learning style. During the workshops, strategies are shared that are specifically targeted to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile learners. Students are given a packet of the mnemonic devices (acronyms, chunking strategy, rhymes, jingles, charts and diagrams, etc.) that are discussed and demonstrated for them. We hope that the content of the workshops has made a positive impact on our students and we think it has. We have observed many students using flashcards, diagrams, etc. and they say that these strategies have helped them to remember."*



Marsha Benton

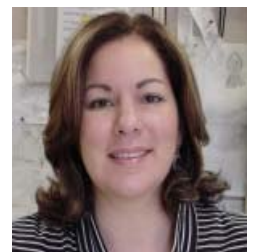


*"Before I took **Bridges to Practice** training, I did not really believe that students had learning disabilities. I used to think they were using it as an excuse! However, as a result of this training, I pay closer attention to my students who are referred by the Office of Disability Services,"* says **Merlene Purkiss**, an associate English professor at Miami-Dade College, Kendall Campus in Miami, Florida. Merlene states *"There are times when disabled students are in my classroom who were not referred by the Office of Disability*

Merlene Purkiss

Services. Based on their reading and writing skills and my awareness of LD, I can most often now tell if there is a possibility they may have a disability and will refer them to the Office of Student Disability Services."

Tania Arocha is a Broward County adult education teacher from Piper Community School in Sunrise, Florida. When Tania first came into adult education several years ago to teach GED, she noticed that many individuals had very low placement scores and others were illiterate. Counting on her Pre-GED and GED books wouldn't do. Then Tania attended a local **Bridges to Practice** training, Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) training, the Florida's 1st Disabilities Symposium, and district training on Learning Disabilities and Accommodations through the Adult and Community Education Department in Broward County. Based on these experiences, she now implements learning style inventories, Learning Needs Screenings, small group instruction using multi-sensory learning techniques, adaptive equipment, and phonics programs which have increased student performance, retention, and enabled those with other sensory impairments, such as hearing loss to feel a part of the learning process. *"I have met many experts in the field of learning disabilities who are willing to assist you when you need help. I have also referred several of my students to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to diagnose the existence of a learning disability and help provide information as to the accommodations needed for testing and instruction. The learning process will go on for me as I continue to see success reflected in my students' learning."*



Tania Arocha

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C. Adult Education Administrators



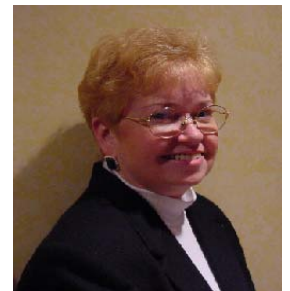
Glenda Anderson works in Leon County's Student Services for Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida and shared how *Bridges to Practice* training impacted her ability to interact with people on the job. *"Working in Student Services means that I encounter people on a daily basis who are struggling with obtaining an education. Many times people like to share past frustrations about their learning experiences. Bridges to Practice training has helped me become more aware and knowledgeable of issues surrounding learning disabilities so I can better counsel and direct students to specific classrooms or programs that best accommodate their learning needs."*

Administrator **Sue Kraul** from Leon County Schools attended *Bridges to Practice* training with her teachers. *"The training raised my awareness level for both the classroom teachers and me that there are successful strategies to be used with students who have a learning disability in our classrooms. I have also discussed with my teachers that some inappropriate student behaviors may actually be masking reluctance on the learner's part to identify or cope with an underlying learning disability."*

D. Corrections Practitioners



Jill Kettler works in the prison setting where *"most of our inmates have been diagnosed with special needs at one time or another in their lives... the others fell through the cracks."* Jill is able to utilize peer tutors in her classroom and incorporate many of the strategies suggested in the *Bridges to Practice* workshops by training tutors. Each tutor has developed techniques to accommodate students with their preferred learning style. Each tutor specializes in a particular area such as reading, language/writing, or mathematics. He can then concentrate on a variety of methods to help the student create an image of the lesson to be learned in his head. Tutors review the previous lesson, and then introduce the daily lesson through verbal instruction, visual presentation, hands-on demonstration, and discussions in each daily lesson. Students are given time to practice the skill either through a worksheet or sometimes a more competitive approach. Finally, the lesson is recapped.



Jill Kettler

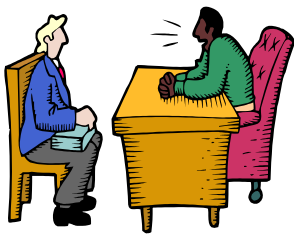
The second half of the three-hour day is spent on either social studies or science. The teacher introduces the lesson. Verbal instruction provided with visual aids such as videos, tapes, or posters are a regular part of the introduction to the lesson. Activities are completed within their peer groups. Finally, the lesson is reviewed with a hint of what will be coming next. The result of classroom management techniques learned through *Bridges to Practice* is evidenced in increased TABE scores and a high percentage of GED passing scores. *"The many reported successes have spurred the enthusiasm needed to pursue what students once thought were only dreams,"* declares Jill.

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Steven Tidd, former teacher at Brevard Correctional Institution in Sharpes, Florida said that training raised his awareness of student's special needs and improved his ability to address them. **Karen Dunn**, a former corrections/ABE teacher indicates that training helped her make decisions on what and how to teach lessons to her students.

However, both **Kathleen Young** and **Richard Grimes** who teach Close Management inmates at Florida State Prison in Tallahassee, Florida are very limited by what they can and cannot do. Many of the *Bridges to Practice* strategies could be employed in less restrictive prison settings but are not acceptable under Department of Corrections regulations in a maximum-security prison.

E. State Service Providers



"Bridges to Practice training has helped me tune into the different accommodations that are available to my clients with learning disabilities. By having the knowledge of my clients' unique learning styles and accommodations that are available, I am able to provide better guidance to my clients who are attending training at various programs in Broward County." (**Dale Sagotsky**, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Fort Lauderdale, Florida)

Question # 2:

2) What changes have you made in your instructional setting as a result of new information gained from the training(s)?

A. Volunteers/Tutors/Trainers

"Our tutor training team for the Polk County literacy program has added components to the pre-service and in-service tutor training that give prospective tutors insight into working with students who are learning disabled. These include 1) the screening survey, 2) the importance of using multi-sensory techniques to enhance storage and retrieval of information, and 3) resources available to the LD learner." (**Betty Gauss**, Lakes Wales Literacy Council Tutor/Tutor Trainer)

Suzanne Ensmann from Indian River Community College indicates, *"As a result of the Bridges to Practice training, colored overlays have been purchased and made available for students' use both in the classroom and at the testing center."*

Judi Rundel from the Franklin County Public Library responded to this question by stating *"I've changed my thinking first of all. Then, I changed the setting to make it more informal. I also tried many different techniques-to get some actual results. However, the adults I worked with were transient and not committed to focusing on long-term goals."*

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B. ABE/GED/ESOL Instructors

Melissa Padgett from Community High School in Osceola County reports that she has implemented daily ten-minute reading comprehension quick takes. This includes transparencies of tables, charts, graphs and clippings from news sources for daily practice and ten-minute activities. She has also included more cooperative learning activities in her classroom in the form of small group and pair share. Her lessons have included more visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities using timelines, life maps, collages, Venn diagrams, T-charts, posters, and banners to stimulate journal writing. Bimonthly 45-minute reading sessions in both large group and individual instruction take place using a variety of reading strategies and sources.

Evelyn Roldan, also from Osceola County responds, *"We have changed the way to identify the work schedule each student needs. For example, in math the instructor created a diagnostic assessment that indicates at which work schedule level the student should be. If the student fails at one or more parts of the test, the teacher will incorporate less challenging material. Or, if the student presents number disorientation, the teacher shows the student how to write his math problems using graph paper."*

In the Passport Program at GCCC, **Audra Leverton** describes the process for providing accommodations. *"Students with learning disabilities are identified upon second contact, if they self-declare. On third contact, students are asked to complete a short questionnaire with an instructor regarding requesting documentation of disability and identifying successful learning strategies. These strategies are then documented in the student folder for other staff members to see and use during instruction. Throughout the student's instructional period, staff members attempt to improve the student's success rate by offering new strategies for the student to try during his/her instructional program. These strategies have derived from the **Bridges to Practice** training and website."* **Barbara West** adds *"the number of student advisements scheduled during the day in the Passport Program are limited in order to have a sufficient amount of time to spend with each new student-that way the student becomes more comfortable in the GED lab setting. We try to provide a private room for testing if appropriate and pencil/paper testing instead of a computer - whatever method works best for the student."*

"As a result of my newfound knowledge, I have made several changes in my instructional setting. For instance, I now allow my disabled students to take their final exam in the Testing Department where it is very quiet, and I give them as much time as they need to take their tests. I also allow them to use dictionaries when they are writing their essays. Above all, even when I indicate on my syllabus that no makeup will be allowed for certain assignments, my disabled students are given the opportunity to makeup. I will also allow them to revise their writing assignments until they get to the point where I see improvement. I will do whatever I can to help them succeed." (**Merlene Purkiss**, Miami-Dade College)

Rochel Abrams, GED Examiner for Leon County Schools, found **Bridges to Practice** training very useful in gaining a better understanding of learning disabilities. *"It let me know what to look for and what to consider when reviewing accommodations requests from people who have learning disabilities. As GED Examiner, I have to provide examinees with special accommodations. This training helped me to better understand some of the accommodations that may be needed."*

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C. Adult Education Administrators

"Accommodating adult learners before they enroll in our programs is important and good PR," exclaims **Glenda Anderson** from Student Services in Leon County's Adult and Community Education department. Glenda continues to say, "***Bridges to Practice*** training has helped shape our sensitivity to how information is disseminated about our classes and programs, including sharing information on technology (websites, web pages), brochures, flyers, and even the manner of speaking with people on the phone."



D. Corrections Practitioners

Steven Tidd, currently a teacher at Cocoa High School but a former instructor at Brevard Correctional Institution changed his delivery of instruction to include peer tutoring and small group activities for tactile learners as a result of ***Bridges to Practice*** training. **Karen Dunn** modifies instruction both in her current position at Okaloosa-Walton Community College and formerly at several correctional facilities by spending more time on reading than on math. "*Critical reading skills are essential in order to do applied mathematics. I spend a lot of time teaching the sounds of letters, have introduced electronic dictionaries, and teaching students to work with computer programs.*"

E. State Service Providers

Dale Sagotsky from Vocational Rehabilitation provides his clients with information from ***Bridges to Practice*** whenever appropriate to equip them with resources that they may not have been knowledgeable about before to increase their knowledge and self-advocacy skills.

Question # 3:

How has the Bridges to Practice training impacted on your awareness and ability to provide programs and services to adults with learning disabilities?

A. Volunteers/Tutors/Trainers



Gwen Sharp, tutor/trainer from the Clay County Literacy Coalition reports that their literacy training sessions all include a section with information and techniques from the ***Bridges to Practice*** training. Gwen remarks, "*These have been eagerly received by prospective tutors apprehensive of their ability to work with learning disabled students. We are grateful to have information and techniques from such a reliable source. We feel that Clay County Literacy Coalition, as an organization, has benefited greatly from information specific to the legal aspects of the diagnosis, methods of obtaining one and how the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act affect programs such as ours.*"

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Suzanne Ensmann, educator and trainer from Indian River Community College says, "***Bridges to Practice** training enhanced our awareness of the quantity and severity with which the impact has upon our students. This heightened level of awareness has encouraged us to use various means to assist our students, such as colored overlays.*"

Judi Rundel found it especially interesting that not all individuals can learn in the traditional classroom setting. "*As an Assistant Librarian, it has made me very aware of the problems of others, especially that the non-traditional setting may be exactly what is needed for some learners. I need to become more understanding, helpful, and mindful of their needs.*"

Donald VerHey in Lakeland, Florida feels that as a result of the **Bridges to Practice** training, "*I will be better able to spot students who have reading disabilities and make them aware of resources available to them.*"

B. ABE/GED/ESOL Instructors

"As a result of attending **Bridges to Practice** training, I am more aware of the difference between a learning difficulty and a learning disability," responds **Evelyn Roldan**, teacher aide from Community High School's ABE/GED program. "*I now have the ability to provide students information that can help them understand and better cope with their disability. The techniques provided through the **Bridges to Practice** training enable me to better communicate with adults with learning disabilities.*" **Audra Leverton**, Gulf Coast Community College's GED Lab Manager in the Passport Program reports that it is now easier to determine who the students are that have learning difficulties and then to modify their learning plans to include accommodations. "*As a program, we have become more conscientious about the types of materials we are purchasing to instruct students. Learning styles have become a major part of the advisement and instructional aspects of our program. We have attempted to purchase more products that appeal to all the senses rather than targeting just one learning modality.*" **Barbara West**, GCCC's Passport Program Specialist concurs with Audra's description of how the university has modified program services to meet the LD learners' needs. "*When I advise a student, we discuss learning styles and methods they can use to enhance their learning.*" It's apparent that GCCC understands the importance of good counseling and conversation with the LD learner prior to testing and placement to more likely ensure student retention and progress.

Marsha Benton, English Learning Manager from GCCC's Success Center attended **Bridges to Practice** training in March 2003. She notes that the *presentation "started me thinking about the number of students who may have undiagnosed learning disabilities and has sensitized me to their challenges. I generally make the font size bigger and print my handouts and exercises on colored paper. I suggest ways that students may enhance their learning and if they have not already done so, take the learning style inventory/evaluation we have available on computer. I also provide direct instruction whenever possible."*

Miami-Dade Associate Professor **Merlene Purkiss** has altered her classroom policies to accommodate her students with LD. **Tania Arocha**, Broward County ABE teacher takes time to find out about each student in her classroom, what has or has not worked for them in the past, and uses learning style inventories to zero in on their learning styles. As a result of **Bridges to Practice** training, the **Bridges to Practice** website, and **Practitioners' Points**, she has become more resourceful in obtaining support services for her students with special needs.

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C. Adult Education Administrators



Glenda Norvell

Glenda Norvell from Leon County Adult and Community Education discusses the impact that *Bridges to Practice* training had on the ability to provide programs and services to adults with learning disabilities. *"The introductory session is one that all education employees should take because it increases awareness and knowledge of learning disabilities. Information on the common learning disabilities, (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dysnomia, dyspraxia, specific*

*learning disability and auditory and visual processing deficits associated with LD), common characteristics of those with LD, disorders that may coexist with LD, characteristics of ADD and ADHD is all essential information for all adult educators. Learning styles and appropriate strategies based on one's learning preference has important classroom implications. I regularly refer people to the *Bridges to Practice* website for more information on learning disabilities. Periodically, the *Panhandle Adult Literacy Center Bulletin* cites information from the *Bridges to Practice* website to provide those in Region I (Santa Rosa, Bay, Jackson, Santa Rosa, Escambia, Okaloosa-Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gadsden, Liberty, Franklin, Leon, and Wakulla Counties) with relevant information for teaching adults with learning disabilities."*

Mark Needle, Educational Specialist with the Division of Workforce Education and **Diana Ross**, Instructional Supervisor with the Office of Adult/Vocational, Alternative and Community Education, Miami-Dade County Public Schools together describe an *"improved awareness of learning issues that led to a better definition of these needs in an Interagency Policy Task Force. In collaboration with the Alliance of Human Services, we are attempting to develop two new full-time positions for educational accommodation specialists that would be liaisons with Vocational Rehabilitation at our three area technical centers."* Diana Ross has been conducting staff development training in adult and technical programs to ensure compliance in completing Miami-Dade County's new 504 Accommodation Plan.

The impetus that prompted Miami-Dade County Public Schools to develop an Adult 504 Plan to document students' disability and need for accommodations prompted a similar plan to be developed for Broward County Schools in October 2003. **Meryl Eisenberg**, Specialist for Adults with Disabilities with Career, Technical, and Adult/Community Education, Broward County Public Schools collaborated with Miami-Dade County's Division of Workforce Education, Broward School's Office of Equal Education Opportunity and Psychological Services department in developing the Adult 504/ADA Confidential Accommodation Plan. Substantial information from *Bridges to Practice* trainings serves as the basis for on-going district-wide training on Learning Disabilities, including adding a new component to the District's New Teacher Training Manual.



During the 2003-04 school year, **Glenda Anderson** from Leon County Adult and Community Education reports, *"ACE has been working on providing additional classes focusing on varying academic levels and accommodating learning disabilities. This includes training teachers and providing resources and materials that meet learners' needs."*

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D. Corrections Practitioners

"It makes it easier to be able to walk into your classroom knowing that you can help make a difference in your students' lives," exclaims **Karen Dunn** after attending *Bridges to Practice* training. **Steven Tidd**, former instructor at Brevard Correctional Institution comments, "*Bridges to Practice* has increased my ability to offer a wider variety of classroom activities to accommodate visual, auditory, and tactile learning styles. I have also adapted my classroom management practices to accommodate auditory learners by incorporating more audiotope materials and use of headphones for audio programs."

Jill Kettler uses a variety of approaches to present instructional content to the inmates at her work location. These approaches include verbal instruction, visual presentation, hands-on demonstration, and discussion on each lesson.

E. State Service Providers



Dale Sagostsky, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Broward County says, "*Bridges to Practice* training has increased my awareness of available resources and assistive tools for the learning disabled. Before the training for example, I had no prior knowledge that colored overlays (Irlen) had helped so many people with reading disabilities improve their reading skills. Similar information will be helpful to share in future counseling sessions with clients who have learning disabilities."

Question # 4:

What are some *Success Stories* you may have experienced with your students or clients because of attending training on learning disabilities?

A. Volunteers/Tutors/Trainers

Suzanne Ensmann, Program Effectiveness Specialist in the Adult Education Program at Indian River Community College and member of the Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC) for Region 3 reports "*We have noticed that some of the students who have used colored overlays have advanced to the next level. Perhaps that is in part due not only to the use of the overlay tool, but also to our instructors' heightened awareness of these students' needs.*"

Not only has *Bridges to Practice* training provided information on supports for people with learning disabilities but also products such as the **Assistive Technology Guide** have been useful in providing practitioners with important resources for individuals with other disabilities, such as vision impairments. **Donald VerHey**, church volunteer for the homeless and substitute teacher from Lakeland acknowledged that the week following his training, he met a friend with vision impairment. Since he had gained some familiarity with assistive technology from the *Bridges to Practice* training, he automatically sought to obtain information on what could help people with vision impairments.



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B. ABE/GED/ESOL Instructors

As a result of implementing more cooperative learning groups in her ESOL classroom design as well as using a variety of organizational activities to structure language lessons, **Melissa Padgett** from Osceola County reports several students who have made some personal gains. *"I can think of three students who have benefited the most from my extra efforts - one who is hearing impaired, another who suffered a stroke ten years ago, and another student recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Although I have always attempted to meet my students' needs, the extra accommodations provided them have really had a positive effect."*

Evelyn Roldan, teacher aide at Community High School's ABE/GED program in Kissimmee describes her success story in a middle-aged student who is still attending their ABE program. *"She has been here for a considerable period of time without doing much to improve on her reading scores on her TABE. Two weeks after we completed **Bridges to Practice** training, we decided to approach her in our effort to understand why she was having so much difficulty. The student told us how she felt every time she read. When she tried to read words, "the letters started jumping off the page." She thought it might be dyslexia. The reading instructor helped her by providing colored overlays. The teacher also recommended that she stop more frequently when she reads to check for comprehension. The next time she tested on TABE, she did well enough to move up to the GED Prep class. She kept working hard, now knowing how to deal with her disability. This student took the complete GED Tests a month ago and she passed every part except Math. She is still working on math in her classroom now. I am sure she is going to pass the Math section of her GED when she takes it again. She is a very diligent worker and we are proud of her achievements."*

Jill Pancake, a computer lab assistant from Community High School in Kissimmee suggests that their program has been able to retain students with disabilities because *"we are now better able to serve them. As a result of the information we received from **Bridges to Practice** training, our students' level of confidence as increased as they adopt new strategies and learning tools."*

Audra Leverton, GED Lab Manager of the Passport Program at GCCC shares her personal "success stories" of some of her students and the momentum that has caused her to stay focused on meeting the needs of learners with learning disabilities. *"The student that inspired my interest in learning disabilities has been in and out of prison, unable to maintain a job and suffering tremendously in his personal life. However, something good has come out of all the bad and that is that he has passed four of five GED subtests and is currently preparing for the last test. What I see in that student is the reason I stay so motivated and focused on those with learning disabilities. Many of the students who come through our program have learned to compensate for their disabilities and therefore, work very well in our program and succeed. However, there are always those few who struggle in the educational setting."*



Audra goes on to describe another success story. *"There is a young woman who has been working in our program longer than I have been here. She was enrolled in the program in 2000 when I joined the team here at GCCC. She has been diagnosed with learning disabilities but the*

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*documentation was more than ten years old. The woman has three children all who have disabilities and her work history has been sporadic at best. By working with the **Bridges to Practice** contacts in our state and with the help of other disability specialists, we were able to discover the accommodations that this student needed to succeed. In addition, through several "miracles" of Dr. Rochelle Kenyon and her colleagues, the student was evaluated and as a result granted accommodations for her GED exam. She recently took three of the tests and passed all comfortably. She is now preparing for the last two tests with new confidence that she has gained from passing the other three tests. She is still nervous about the last two tests but what we see now is an empowered, confident woman who has made plans to improve her life and the lives of her children through education."*

*"Believe me," says **Merlene Purkiss**, Associate English Professor, Miami-Dade College-Kendall Campus, "many of my disabled students now perform better and get better grades than my regular students. In fact, by the end of the semester, some indicate to me that they want to take their tests with their non-disabled peers rather than take it in a separate testing room. This twelve-hour workshop really opened my eyes to meeting student needs, particularly those who process information differently and need a little more support to help level the playing field."*

Piper Community School ABE instructor, **Tania Arocha** from Broward County, Florida shares the story of a 69-year old gentleman who began in their program almost a year ago. This gentleman with a vision impairment scored 1.6 on the Level L TABE (Reading) and 1.7 on a Level E TABE (Math). *"One thing I immediately was able to discern from the testing was that he read by spelling letters aloud. Based on his learning history, he had no reading comprehension but strictly relied on letter identification to sound out words. My District ESE Specialist introduced me to the HEC Reading Horizons Program (a phonics-based approach). The student worked on this program and with my background on LVA principles, was able to get him to progress to the Edmark Reading Program. I learned about using visual aids and modifications from a training I attended at the Lighthouse of Broward that combined the principles of **Bridges to Practice** training with its focus on learning disabilities with the American Foundation for the Blind's Bridging the Gap project that focused on the needs of people with vision impairments. As a result of this training, our school purchased a screen magnifier for this student, which gave him more confidence in his learning environment. A few months later, this same person improved his reading scores to a 2.1, and his math to a 2.3!"*



Tania continues, *"I have also had the opportunity to work with a group of deaf students. To be honest, I would have lacked the confidence to assist them if it weren't for my ESE Specialist's assistance and the opportunity I had to attend the 2001 Florida's Disabilities Symposium in St. Augustine, Florida. There, we had the opportunity to visit the St. Augustine School for the Blind and Deaf and learned about students with these conditions. As a result of these training opportunities, I now have the skills to be able to comply with our district's requirements for providing disability documentation, obtaining authorization for release of information, maintaining records, administering learning style inventories, learning needs screenings, and developing an AIEP, which now in our district translates to an Adult Plan 504 Plan. One of our deaf students has been promoted to the GED level and is getting ready to take her GED exam."*

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Another student who started with a 5th grade level equivalent on TABE, just retested and scored 9.4 on her reading, 7.5 on her math, and 10.6 on her language subtests. I was very surprised after several days being absent from class that upon my return, one of my deaf students spontaneously shared all the things that happened in class while I was away!"

"Finally, I have many stories to share where students who were screened by our district's ESE Specialist for hearing, vision, and learning processing problems were referred to Vocational Rehabilitation or the Department of Children and Families for additional support services. Based on the outcome of the evaluations, recommendations were made, resources secured, and time after time, my students have demonstrated improvement. As a result of the knowledge I've obtained through these trainings combined with expertise of the trainers, I can now face with confidence the student who walks through my classroom door, no matter the need, and know that there are supports just a phone call away. The learning process goes on and I look forward to continued workshops/conferences related to Adults with Disabilities. I know the positive impact it has had on me and my students."

C. Corrections Practitioners

Steven Tidd tells us *"I have several success stories. One such story is of a young man who had given up on earning his GED because of the new version. The **Bridges to Practice** training helped me show him how he could make some adaptations to the test setting and we worked on coping strategies daily until he was able to overcome his difficulties. He now has his GED and is enrolled in technical classes."*



Jill Kettler notes, *"One young man from our last GED Tests scored 800 on the Social Studies test. Another inmate discovered he had a real talent for writing. Still another was thrilled to get his GED and gain experience at the work camp. All of these special education students gained respect for their abilities and hope for their futures."*

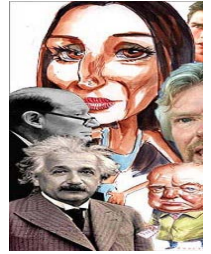
*"I have worked in adult education for a number of years and usually have worked with those students who read below the fourth grade level," indicates **Karen Dunn**. "Many students come to you hoping that you will have the key to open the door to their learning. They struggle to learn the way the teacher approaches learning. After **Bridges to Practice** training, I tried to make them understand that they learn differently from the person sitting next to them. I am not an "Equal Opportunity Employer"—I **do** treat each student differently. I have introduced electronic dictionaries and work with students on computer programs. I have used the five basic elements of effective reading. My aides and I go over and over teaching the sounds. We use phonemic awareness and phonics to get them started on their reading. I actually found it easier to make progress in the prison setting than in a regular adult classroom because you know where the inmates will be every day in your classroom!"*

Karen continues, *"I have worked at various correctional facilities, including Taylor, Gulf Annex and Walton, and can relate the story of one particular inmate I worked with who was reading at a first grade level. In a year's time, we worked up to a fourth grade level. His four-year-old daughter came to visit him one Saturday with a book she asked him to read to her. He was so proud that he could read to her instead of hiding behind his illiteracy."*

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D. State Service Providers

*"I have advised some of my clients about "Ennis' Gift," the Hello Friend Foundation/Bill Cosby video which I first saw in **Bridges to Practice** training, comments **Dale Sagotsky**, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. "I think that it is very up-lifting to know that there are so many celebrities, CEOs, and famous people with learning disabilities who are successful -They have not surrendered to their learning difficulties but rather embraced them and learned to face their challenges head on."*



Bridges Across the Miles would not have been possible without the following people that gave their time by responding to the questions and sharing their stories:

Rochel Abrams, Adult and Community Education, Leon County Schools, GED Examiner
Glenda Anderson, Adult and Community Education, Leon County Schools, Student Services
Tania Arocha, Piper Community School, Broward County Public Schools, ABE Instructor
Marsha Benton, Gulf Coast Community College, Passport Program, English Learning Manager
Karen Dunn, Okaloosa-Walton Community College, Instructor
Susan Ensmann, Indian River Community College, Program Effectiveness Specialist, PDAC III
Betsy S. Gauss, Lake Wales Literacy Council, Tutor/Trainer and ABE/GED Teacher, Polk County
Richard Grimes, Department of Corrections, Florida State Prison, Instructor
Jill Kettler, Department of Corrections, Academic Instructor
Sue Kraul, Adult and Community Education, Leon County Schools, Assistant Principal
Audra Leverton, Gulf Coast Community College, Passport Program, GED Lab Manager
Mark Needle, Division of Workforce Development Education, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Educational Specialist
Glenda Norvell, Adult and Community Education, Leon County Schools
Melissa Padgett, Community High School, Osceola Public Schools, ESOL Teacher
Jill Pancake, Community High School, Osceola Public Schools, Computer Lab Assistant
Merlene Purkiss, Miami-Dade College, Kendall Campus, Associate Professor, English
Evelyn Roldan, Community High School, Osceola Public Schools, ABE/GED Teacher Aide
Diana Ross, Office of Adult/Vocational, Alternative and Community Education, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Instructional Supervisor
Judi Rundel, Franklin County Public Library, Assistant Librarian
Dale Sagotsky, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation – Broward County, Counselor
Gwen Sharp, Clay County Literacy Coalition, Tutor/Trainer
Steven Tidd, Cocoa High School, Brevard County Public Schools, Instructor
Donald VerHey, McKeel Academy, Lakeland, Florida, Substitute Teacher
Barbara West, Gulf Coast Community College, Success Center, Passport Program Specialist
Kathleen Young, Department of Corrections, Florida State Prison, Instructor

