

CHADD Testifies to the SSA on ADHD and Employment

by Cynthia A. Smith, MS, JD

SOME ADULTS WITH ADHD cannot be gainfully employed due to the chronic, substantial inattention and executive functioning challenges caused by the disorder. CHADD is working to have the Social Security Administration recognize ADHD as a disability that can inhibit the ability to work and to ensure that reasonable job accommodations and supports are available for individuals who cannot engage in substantial and meaningful employment without them.

On January 20 and 21, 2010, three CHADD volunteers provided public comment to an advisory panel convened by the SSA. This is the first time CHADD has provided such testimony, which supplemented its written recommendations to the panel. In addition to discussing their personal and family experiences with ADHD, the volunteers explained how executive functioning skills, including the ability to sustain attention, can impact employment.

Samantha Bostrom, MD, gave a poignant account of the tragic life of one adult who was unable to work and unable to obtain benefits. “For those most severely affected, it is no less impairing in the ability to obtain self-sufficiency through an occupation than other brain impairments such as Alzheimer’s,” she said. “ADHD is often recognized by the secondary consequences of the disorder, seen by our society as substance abuse, antisocial behavior, depression, anxiety, incompetence or laziness on the job, interpersonal disasters and legal problems.” Bostrom concluded,

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ed, “Those of us who are in the position to make policy changes for individuals with disabilities need to use the intact ability of our frontal brain area to maintain attention on the fact that five percent of individuals with ADHD are severely disabled.”

Michael Garza, EdD, a member of CHADD’s board of directors, discussed some of the challenges he encountered before becoming a college professor. He took nine years to get his bachelor’s degree, and was considered “lazy, a day dreamer, not able to stay on task, distractible, impulsive.” These labels resulted in poor self-esteem, poor performance, frustration, and feelings of being an outsider.

Katy Warren, a young woman with ADHD and related disorders who receives SSI benefits, described her life experience and hope for the future. “I am bound and determined on returning to school to complete a graduate degree in neuroscience so I can finally enter an occupation that my complicated brain can handle.”

The **Occupational Information Development Advisory Panel** was formed in 2008 and charged with providing “independent advice and recommendations on plans and activities to replace the Dictionary of Occupational Titles currently used in the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) disability determination process.” The OIDAP has been working on meeting its charge, and recently published a summary of its work and recommendations. **A**



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