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CPD Legacy Story: Mary Ellen Heiner

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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The CPD Blog is beginning a new weekly feature titled "CPD Legacy Story." These personal stories share the impact that the people and projects at the CPD have had on individual lives and families' lives. All stories will be archived and available to view at any time. If you or someone you know would be willing to share their CPD impact story with us, please contact Connie Pehrson.

Our first Legacy Story is from our own Mary Ellen Heiner who is the Administrative Staff Assistant & Office Manager for the Early Intervention Research Institute (EIRI) at the CPD.

My Home Away From Home

By Mary Ellen Heiner

How can mere words express the impact the Center for Persons with Disabilities, specifically Dr. Glendon Casto, have had on my life? The CPD made me feel at ease and appreciated from the first moment I entered its doorway. None of its staff ever treated me as a person with a disability—they became my family and friends. In particular, Dr. Casto was (and will always be) my hero.

When I moved to Logan, I was alone and scared—it was the first time I had been away from home and completely on my own. I had been here a month and hadn't been successful in finding a job and my money was running near the empty mark and I was worried I was going to have to move back home and admit that I was not capable of living on my own—that I was a failure. Then a member of the CPD administrative staff called me in for an interview and offered a part-time secretarial job working with the Early Intervention Research Institute (EIRI), which was the Research and Evaluation Division of the CPD. Even though I needed more than a part-time job to meet my personal expenses, I accepted the position—after all, it was better than no money at all.

I was a working disaster! This was “back in the day” when computers were just becoming affordable (so) that smaller organizations could actually afford to have one. I had graduated from college a couple years prior to this time and had only had minimal experience working on a computer of any kind. I was continually deleting things—important and very time-consuming things. After two weeks, I was called into the director’s office and was told that things were not working out; however, Glen Casto was able to convince the powers that be into giving me a second chance. They agreed to put me on a one-month probationary period and then changed me to full-time status; thus, giving me more time for hands-on experience with the office equipment—particularly the computer. I took the manual home at nights and I read it and then I would go in early and stay late so I could become familiar with the equipment.

Now, 25 years later, I’m still here and feel very comfortable with a computer and often help others with their computer problems! I owe it all to Glen for giving me a second chance—something he frequently did with many he worked with.

I thank the CPD for taking a chance on hiring a young, inexperienced girl and making me feel right at home and comfortable with my disability. I extend a very special thanks to Dr. Glen Casto for being my mentor and teaching me the importance of valuing myself as a productive member of society and trusting in my abilities rather than my disabilities.