

Opening Doors Newsletter

*A publication to promote the inclusion of individuals
with disabilities within AmeriCorps programs.*

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Disclosure

Disclosure is and will be an issue for supervisors, members and program staff. There are reasons for members or potential members to not disclose; **Gossipy** environment, **fear** of potential reaction, it is not **relevant**, associated **stigma** with the disability and the need to disclose to **others** outside the service programs. Unfortunately members may risk unnecessary consequences for not disclosing; social **isolation**, feeling compelled to **misrepresent** diagnosis and need for support, **stress**, and the inability to request an **accommodation**. Creating a culture which welcomes and values members with individual differences will possibly eliminate the negative implications. Please visit http://mt.gov/mcsn/opendoors/od_assistance.asp to view the Montana AmeriCorps disclosure notice. As stated at the Program Director's Training these notices should be posted at your sites or given to members individually. Remember it is up to the individual to disclose a disability and that all medical and/or disability –related information is kept in locked files separate from personnel records, with limited access by only select personnel. If you have any questions about the need for disclosure documents please call or email Kathy Bean.

Disability Awareness

After speaking with some of you I thought I'd try to provide disability awareness through the use of real scenario situations and present it in a format that would be educational and hopefully resourceful to all of you. Let me know what you think.

A service member with low vision whose essential service function was to assist audience members at a concert venue stated he could not see well in the shadowy arena. He requested that the sponsoring agency make the arena brighter which would enable him to perform the essential functions of this position. The organization denied this request. Who would the law side with?

The law states that no program or activity may discriminate against an individual on the basis of the individual's disability. However, organizations are not required to go above and beyond reason to accommodate individuals. Making the concert venue well – lit alters the fundamental nature of the service environment and his request was denied.

There are three common exemptions that an organization has with respect to their obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act:

- ✓ If accommodating an individual with a disability would result in an undue financial or administrative hardship to the program or organization.
- ✓ If the individual's disability could result in a direct threat to him/herself, or others in the service environment.
- ✓ If the individual's disability, or accommodating the individual would result in altering the fundamental nature of the service environment.

Thank you for your efforts toward promoting disability inclusion. Call or email with any questions or concerns; 406- 444-5547 or kbean@mt.gov.