
Disability Employability Conference

May 11-13, 2016, Great Falls MT

Presenter Biographies

~OUT OF STATE PRESENTERS~



Zach Anner

Zach Anner is an award-winning comedian, show host, author and public speaker. In 2011, he won his own travel show on the Oprah Winfrey Network, "Rollin' With Zach". He has also hosted the web series "Have A Little Faith" and "Top of the Monday" for Rainn Wilson's media company SoulPancake and "Riding Shotgun" and "Workout Wednesdays" on his YouTube channel which has over 13 million hits. His comedic memoir, [If at Birth You Don't](#)

[Succeed](#) was published by Henry Holt and released in early March of 2016. Zach lives in Buffalo, NY and Austin, TX, and spends most of his spare time in his underwear, thinking about how he can change the world.



Zosia Zaks

Zosia Zaks, M.Ed., C.R.C, is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) with 15 years of experience working primarily with autistic adults. He is the Manager of Programs and Education at Towson University's Hussman Center for Adults with Autism, where he specifically directs 2 programs focused on work adjustment and readiness for employment. He also teaches autism and disability courses in the College of Health Professions. Before working at Towson University, he worked at Maryland's vocational rehabilitation department, the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling, where primarily he counseled transitioning youth in a community living skills

program. Zaks provides professional development workshops around the country on a range of issues including facilitating employment success. He currently services on the board of Itineris, Inc., a Baltimore agency that provides employment support to adults on the autism spectrum, and on the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council. Zaks brings multiple perspectives to his work as a professional and as a self-advocate.

**Rita Martin, Assistant Director
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)**



Rita Martin from the State of Indiana is the Assistant Director of the CSAVR. Rita has more than 33 years of experience in the field of rehabilitation, having begun her career as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, CRC in 1972. She is the former State Director for the Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, having served in this capacity from 1995-2001. During her tenure as State Director, Indiana underwent a Redesign of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Deliver System, with an emphasis on customer service and customer satisfaction. There were also significant yearly increases in the numbers of

individuals obtaining employment during Rita's leadership of the agency. She is also a Past President of the CSAVR and a Mary E. Switzer Scholar. From 1998-2000, Rita served on the National Workforce Excellence Board established by the Department of Labor. Her knowledge of field services and operating a state agency is of significant value to the State's Council.



Marsha Threlkeld

Marsha Threlkeld is a trainer, consultant, presenter, and practitioner related to Information and Assistive Technology, Employment First, School-to-Work, and Person Centered Planning. Her assistive technology work includes Apple devices and apps to promote independence, connectivity, productivity, and inclusion. Marsha has collaborated with Apple, Inc. to provide trainings and regularly presents on handheld technologies across her home state of Washington and nationally. She has created Assistive Tech Learning Cohorts of educators and others to absorb, practice, implement, and share with school and employment communities

Marsha is a Subject Matter Expert with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, working to move students from school to meaningful jobs in the community.

Person Centered Planning has been a backbone of Marsha's work for more than 25 years after learning from the masters; John O'Brien, Beth Mount, and Debra McLean. Marsha has created booklets to include Career Planning and the IEP, Person Centered Planning Identifying Life Goals, and Plan Your Career and Envision Your Life.

She has worked with school communities, students and their teams to adopt individualized, community based, post school employment and life goals, set up community based work experiences, inform families, receive the necessary technologies, and change the fabric of transition programs to reflect their communities while connecting students to opportunities in employment and community membership.

Marsha's work with individuals in Washington State addresses creating meaningful futures to include work, assessing work conditions to adopt assistive technologies, and introducing changes and technologies to individuals and those closest to them.

~PRESENTERS FROM MONTANA~

Jill Keough, M.R.C., C.R.C.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services in the Great Falls, MT office.

Jill has been employed as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for 20 years with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind services in the Great Falls office. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Human Services from the University of Great Falls along with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Utah State University. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). She enjoys her job of helping others by making a difference in their lives by giving them hope. Jill is the current liaison for CMR High School and Paris Gibson. She has weekly office hours at CMR High School to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. Jill is also a counselor that specializes in providing services to individuals that are Deaf.

Pete Townsend, M.R.C.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services, Great Falls, MT

Pete reports that immediately after high school graduation, he enrolled in the college of Hard Knocks, Vietnam, sawmills, logging and cowboying. Later in life, he invested 3 months into Adult Basic Education courses before spending 3 and half years at the University of Great Falls obtaining Bachelor's degrees in Counseling Psychology and Human Services. He graduated with Honors in 1995. He followed up his undergraduate training with a Master's Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling from Utah State University in 2004. He has been employed with the State of Montana since 2000. Over the years he has learned how to live with his own disabilities. He grew up with people who had disabilities. He has worked side by side with people with disabilities. He has also dedicated his career to helping people with disabilities. Pete provides services to individuals and students across central Montana. He is currently the liaison for multiple high schools including Belt, Cascade, Centerville, Choteau, Conrad, Dutton-Brady, Fairfield, Highwood, Montana School for the Deaf & Blind, Power, Simms and Valier. He is also a specialized counselor for consumers that are Deaf.

Kathy Reed, M.Ed., Great Falls Public Schools

Kathy Reed has served as a Vocational Resource Educator for the past seven years. Ms. Reed's work with students centers on basic work skills (including soft skills), self-advocacy, and adult agency awareness.

Ms. Reed joined the Great Falls Public Schools in 1982. Prior to her current assignment, she worked in programs designed for students experiencing emotional and behavioral disorders, and non-categorical resource classrooms.

Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science in Education from Montana State University-Billings, and a Master of Education, Vocational Educational from Montana State University-Northern. Ms. Reed is a member of the CSPD Region II Transition Committee, and ASCD (formally the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development). Her interest includes work with non-profits organizations such as the Alma Smith Jacobs Foundation, The Great Falls Rescue Mission, and The Joseph Project food distribution. She enjoys outdoor sports, music, and time with family.

Ann Taylor, Great Falls Public Schools

Ann graduated from the University of West Florida with a degree in Special Education along with backgrounds in the medical field (neurosurgery) and psychology. She has been teaching over 20 years (cumulative). Her current job title is Vocational Transition Educator, Great Falls Public Schools, and she has been involved with the vocational program 10 years (cumulative).

Karen McBirnie, M.Ed., C.R.C.

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services in the Great Falls, MT office.

Karen McBirnie has been a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services since January of 2015. She is the current liaison with Great Falls High School for all new student applications. She has worked with transition youth as a vocational rehabilitation counselor previously in Washington State. Karen holds a Montana School Counselor License, and recently gained her designation as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC).

Pam Brandt, Training and Development Specialist, Montana Dept. of Labor

Pam Brandt has been training staff and students for the State of Montana for nearly 20 years. Pam is a life-long Montanan with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with minors in Communication and Business Administration from Carroll College and a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Communication, Psychology, and Education from Oregon State University. Pam has worked for the State of Montana for over 26 years. Pam spent 14 years with the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks as the Organizational Development Coordinator, providing training and logistics for their Leadership & Management Development Program, successfully graduating 234 employees over 10 programs within 11 years, to help with succession planning. Pam joined Department of Labor and Industry as the Training and Development Specialist for the Montana Career Information System (MCIS) in 2013 and has been working with middle schools, high schools and colleges, as well as Job Service, Vocational Rehabilitation, and WIOA partner agencies around the state. Pam is passionate about the great tools and resources in MCIS to help ensure students and clients have a career plan and a resume, whether entering the workforce or continuing their education.

Novelene Martin, Bureau Chief of the Developmental Disabilities Program

Novelene Martin, Bureau Chief of the Montana Developmental Disabilities Program, began her career working in a community-based group home. From there, she moved into her career with the State of Montana. First at the Montana Developmental Center, then to eastern Montana working as a Quality Improvement Specialist for the Developmental Disabilities Program. In early 2005, Novelene took a job as a Regional Program Officer for Montana's Children's Mental Health Bureau. At this same time, her son joined the family through adoption. When her son was about 9 months of age, Novelene didn't think he was reaching his developmental milestones and contacted her local Part C Early Intervention provider. And so began the family's experience receiving services through the State's Developmental Disabilities Program. In 2012, the family moved to Helena and Novelene began working again with the Developmental Disabilities Program. The Developmental Disabilities Program provides home and community-based services to individual with intellectual disabilities of all ages throughout all corners of our vast State. The presentation will cover the services available to individuals, how services are accessed, and how services can enhance the life of the person with a disability.

Sally Sjaastad, M.S., C.R.C.

Sally Sjaastad has worked for Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) for over 25 years as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor; a Counselor Supervisor; a Regional Administrator and most recently as the Employer Services Specialist. This new position was created to meet the demands of the Workforce Innovative Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. WIOA mandates that Vocational Rehabilitation directly engages with businesses and aligns with workforce partners to meet the needs of today's job-driven economy. The goal is to collaborate with employers across Montana and develop strategies that provide workforce solutions for businesses while increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Sally earned her Bachelor's degree in Rehabilitation Services at Eastern Montana College Billings, and her Master's degree in Rehabilitation and Community Counseling from Montana State University-Billings. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and resides in Billings.

Tammy Hogan, M. Ed., C.R.C.

Tammy Hogan serves as the Youth Services Specialist for Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS). She is very involved in developing Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities. In the past, Tammy has worked as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Supervisor, and Regional Administrator for VRBS. Tammy is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) and has a Master of Education Degree in Counseling and Development. In her spare time, Tammy enjoys attending her kids' soccer and basketball games, spending time with family, traveling, and reading.

Beverly Berg, C.R.C.C.

Beverly graduated from the University of Montana with a Bachelor of Arts in Home Economics. In 1984 she attended Western Michigan University to obtain a master's degree in Blindness Rehabilitation. Since 1985 she worked as a vision rehabilitation therapist, rehabilitation counselor supervisor, and program administrator. Beverly is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor through CRCC and Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist through ACVREP, she maintains membership in the Montana Association for Rehabilitation and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of Blind and Visually

Impaired. She is also a board member of Low Vision Montana. She has worked for Blind and Low Vision Services for 38 years.

Margaret Keener, BSW

Benefits Planning/Site Manager, North Central Independent Living Services Inc.

Margaret Keener has been with North Central Independent Living Services Inc. (NCILS) for eleven years. The past ten years she has worked primarily on Social Security Work Incentives Benefits Planning and was the Project Director for the Work Incentives Planning Assistance (WIPA) Project for nine years. Currently Margaret is the Benefits Planning/Site Manager for NCILS. Margaret also serves as the Facilitator for the Region II Youth Transitions Committee and has done so for five years. She coordinates the Living Well with a Disability Workshop Series, provides one on one service to Consumers of NCILS and provides training on Social Security to Community Partners as requested. Margaret has a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Social Work and 27 years of experience working in the Social Service Field. Prior to her work at NCILS Margaret provided services in the Mental Health Field, managed Employment Programs for a HUD based Housing Authority, provided Emergency Assistance Services to the Homeless and worked with families through Child Protective Services. Margaret currently lives in Great Falls with her husband Gary and her dog Rosalee.

Roberta Zenker, Attorney at Law

Roberta Zenker has been an attorney for nearly twenty five years. She served as the Madison County Attorney for fourteen years, worked for the State Office of Public Defender as an appellate attorney for four years and worked for Disability Rights Montana (DRM) for seven years in a variety of positions including the employment discrimination unit where she litigated employment discrimination cases. She is currently in charge of outreach and training for DRM.

Roger Shelly, Project Coordinator, Rural Institute of the University of Montana

Shelley has extensive experience working in rural areas of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, North and South Dakota and Alaska building capacity around developing self-employment as well as wage employment for youth and adults with disabilities. He has worked with people with traumatic brain injuries, intellectual disabilities and people with dual diagnoses (mental health and developmental disabilities). Shelley also has

experience working with Montana Workforce Agencies. He is also part of the Pre-Employment Transition Service Technical Assistance Center.

Melissa Clark, Owner of Lissie's Love Yums

Melissa Clark, who is usually called Lissie, is a fighter, a survivor. Her business story is a tribute to her fortitude. Lissie has challenges in leading a normal life, but she has excelled, despite being told as a child she wouldn't be able to learn. Her parents were alcoholics, and Lissie was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), one of the first in Montana to be so diagnosed over 30 years ago. Today Lissie runs her own business, making gourmet dog biscuits which she sells at the Farmers Market in Great Falls, Montana and through phone and email orders.

Christy Sofianek, Project Search Coordinator

Christy has been a special education teacher in the 1990's. She has consistently been involved in Special Olympics since 2004. She then was the co-curriculum developer for ROC (Reach Out and Care) Wheels, and then the UNIFY Coordinator for the Special Olympics. Most recently, she has been a special education teacher and the lead coordinator of Project Search in the Bozeman area.

Bronwyn Troutman, Movin' On in Montana

Bronwyn Troutman is project manager of Movin' On in Montana, a summer transition program for high school students with disabilities who are considering college. Additionally, she served one year as an Access Coordinator at Disability Services for Students at University of Montana. Bronwyn continues to work for and collaborate with Rural Institute, DSS, and Voc Rehab. A VR student herself, she is passionate about equal access to higher education for students with disabilities.

June Hermanson BA, M.Ed.

June Hermanson is the founder and Program Director for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum and the Montana Youth Transitions Project. The past sixteen years of June's career have been spent on how to build a system that will make the transitions from high school to the adult world a smooth process for youth with disabilities and their families. June was born congenitally legally blind and has traveled the path that she

now works to make smooth for young people. During her high school years June did not test well and she and her parents were told by numerous teachers that she “had no potential”. Her parents never accepted that and she went on to college first getting her BA in Social Work, and a M. Ed. June has worked in the field of disability services for over 30 years.

Nancy P. Gibson, Attorney at Law

Nancy Gibson has been practicing law in Missoula, Montana since 1985. She focuses her practice on elder law and planning for persons with disabilities. She is a member and past director of The Special Needs Alliance, an invitation-only organization of attorneys specializing in special needs planning, and a member and past director of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. She provides legal services to clients throughout Montana through her specialization in elder and disability law.