

February 2010 NewsLetter Article

ANY TICK OF THE CLOCK

By Dan Ohler

On Thursday afternoon, January 7th, 2010, a tanker truck driving on Interstate 70 near Springfield, Ohio lost control, went across the median strip and struck a shuttle bus carrying ten passengers. The driver and three passengers, individuals that lived in an ICF/MR in Clark County, were fatally wounded. Four people going about their day just as they had many days prior, perhaps over the course of many years, never made it to their destination and ultimately never made it home that night. Just like that, with one simple tick of the clock, life changed its course for the friends and families of four individuals in Clark County.

Quite often in our profession, we hear about ensuring the “health, safety and welfare” of the individuals that we serve. Sometimes it makes us want to scream! Quite often in our profession, we hear about ensuring individuals have the same opportunities to live, work and play in the community that everyone else is assured. In fact, recent policy coming out of the *Civil Rights Division* at the *United States Department of Justice* makes clear their intent to “ensuring that states...provide services in integrated, appropriate, community settings”. President Obama has declared this the “Year of Community Living”. The realities of the world we live in, the realities of “community living” for all citizens of this country, are that sometimes bad things happen to people and there is not a thing the “professionals” can do to prevent it. Are there things professionals can do to lessen the risk of harm to individuals we serve? Sure there are. Does that mean avoiding community involvement? God help us if it does.

There may well be some that will use this accident as an example of why individuals with developmental disabilities should not be “out in the community”. In fact, I was asked by a media reporter (whom I shall not name), “...why on earth would a bus with people who are [developmentally disabled] be out on a highway when it is snowing”. After overcoming my initial moment of being appalled, I calmly responded, “Perhaps the same reason thousands of other people were out on the road that afternoon – from my understanding, they were going home from work.”

As we go about our jobs, as we go about our lives, we have to realize that there are simply some things we cannot control. No matter how much we might want too, the hands of fate will at times reach down and dictate the path we follow. The reality is that with “...any tick of the clock, life can change its course...”. Say a prayer for the four people that lost their lives on a snowy afternoon in Clark County; say a prayer for their friends and family; and, say a prayer for the driver of that truck as I sense nothing about that individual’s life will ever be the same again. Then go about your profession of enhancing the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities; realize that you will never be able to completely ensure the health and safety of individuals we serve (i.e., no matter what a *CMS* regulator might suggest); and most of all, appreciate the opportunity you have to make a difference!