

Disabled Job Scene

'Not creatures to be afraid of'

Job Brokerage Centre connects disabled with meaningful jobs

By Carol Johnstone

Sitting behind the reception desk at the Job Brokerage Centre, Thomas Watt types furiously at a computer. He's one of the quick ones.

A high-functioning autistic, Watt works two hours a day for the Job Brokerage Centre (JBC) and volunteers two days a week as a clerk at Victoria General Hospital's gift shop.

JBC, which moved last October from Brunswick Street to Young and Robie Streets, is helping about 80 disabled adults find jobs in the community.

"People don't believe they can do a good job," says Employment Services Coordinator, Clairemarie Haley. "They're not creatures to be afraid of."

Executive Director Leslie Graham says, "Let's face it, there are a lot of young mentally and physically handicapped individuals that have a lot on the ball and are very eager to get out in the community and pay their way." She says there are about 100 on the waiting list.

Graham says that when the JBC secures employment for one of its clients, it guarantees the employer it will provide a job coach to work

with the disabled person until he or she has learned the necessary skills.

"Some people, it's taken a couple of days and they're on their way, (though) we have a couple of individuals who will require full-time support forever and ever, amen," Graham says.

Until December, Watt also worked at the Federal Business Development Bank (FBDB) three afternoons a week for \$6 per hour.

"It was only supposed to last a couple of weeks and it ran for months," says Haley. The FBDB hired Watt to help with its Entrepreneur and Franchise Expo Trade Show, part of Small Business Week, at the World Trade and Convention Centre in October.

"If we hadn't had him available to us we would have missed some deadlines for sure," says Shawn Cunningham, FBDB manager of business training.

"He types 68 words a minute," Cunningham says. "Any projects we've given him, he's completed them right on time, if not faster than we expected."

For the first week and a half at the FBDB, Watt was accompanied by job coach Teresa Daigle.

"He hadn't worked on 6.0 Word Perfect until he went there," Daigle says.

"He was only shown once, and I was there that day. I wouldn't be able to do it, now. He can."

A highlight of his work experience at the FBDB was greeting people at the entrance to the exhibit and handing out brochures, not an ability generally associated with autism.

"When (Watt) does need assistance, it's mostly with social areas," says Daigle, but "he was right in the entry greeting people and feeling very comfortable. I was so happy for him."

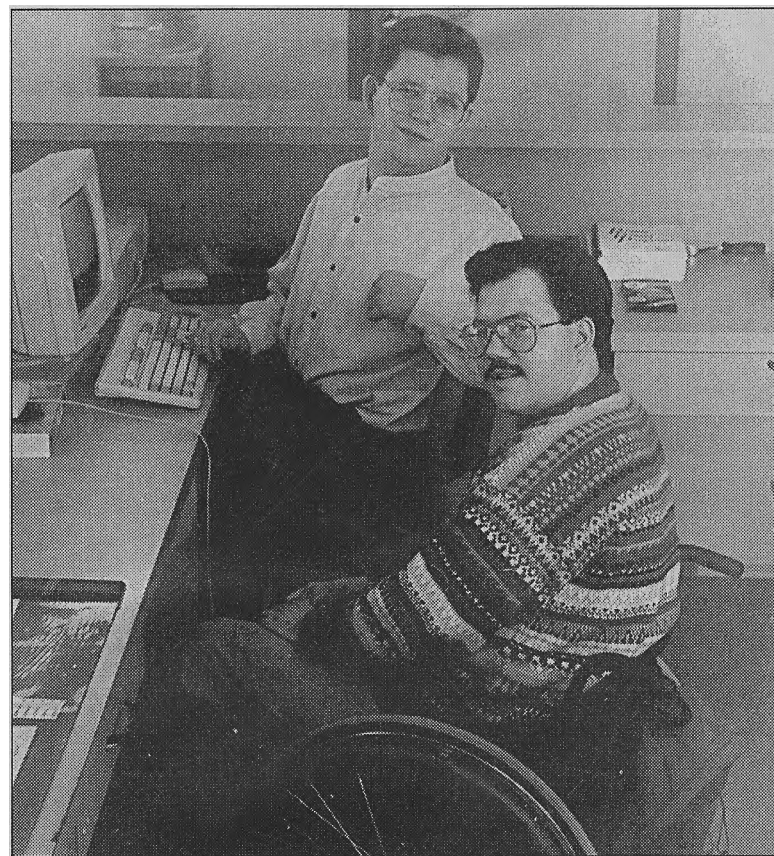
Now, the job at the FBDB has run out and Watt is on call.

"It must be a slow time of the year," Watt says, deleting paragraphs from the screen of the computer behind the reception desk at JBC. "Nothing much going on."

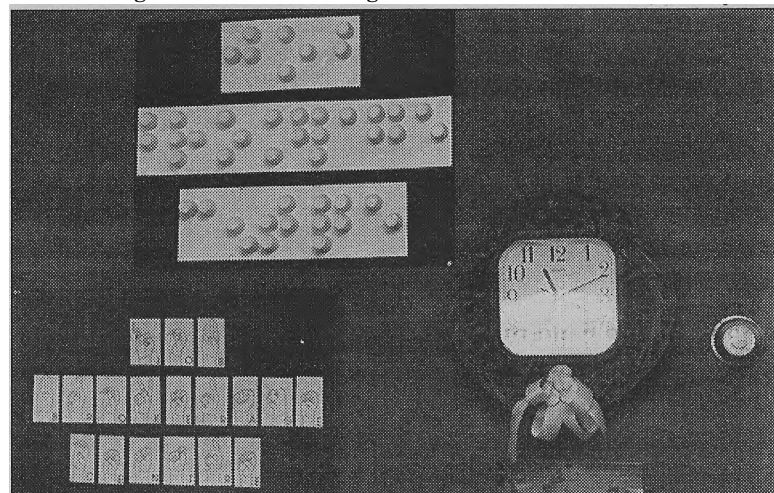
"Thomas is a good fellow," says Cunningham at FBDB. "If we have some more projects, we'll have him back... if he's available."

Watt, who says he's thinking of looking for a full-time job, knows what he'll be looking for.

"I love typing," he says. Typing's my forte."



Thomas Watt at work with wheel-chair bound Gordon Publicover, office manager at the Job Brokerage Centre.



PHOTOS: CAROL JOHNSTONE

Coffee creamers spell out "Job Brokerage Centre" in braille.