

SourceAmerica[®]

Vol. 41, No. 1

WORKPLACE



Dynamic Change

New CEO and
President of
SourceAmerica,
Steve Soroka



Speakers Bureau Highlight

By Cary Tennis

Jolene Britt

As a child, Jolene Britt had a secret. When parents or teachers gave her a book, she studied the pictures. She could usually figure out what was going on from the pictures. Her secret was safe until the third grade.

Then she was given the book *Frog and Toad*. *Frog and Toad* did not have enough pictures.

“They asked me what it was about and I couldn’t tell them,” she says. “And that’s when they found out my secret. My secret was that I could not read.” Jolene was a smart, capable child but because of the learning disability known as severe dyslexia, she had not yet learned to read. Today, through independent hard work, and with the help of adult literacy programs, she has brought herself to read at a fourth-grade level. But the effort still brings anxiety.

A smart, college-educated married mother of two, Jolene is one of an estimated 32 million American adults who are considered functionally illiterate. Many try to keep it a secret.

That’s what Jolene did throughout most of her working life. Then through

AbilityOne and SourceAmerica, she found a position with a company that gave her the tools and support needed to do a great job within her set of abilities.

Severe dyslexia is a learning disability. It has nothing to do with intelligence. But people with impaired reading skills are often judged to be of low intelligence and ability.

When she was in eighth grade, her school principal, doctor and teachers concluded that maybe, if she was lucky, when she graduated from high school, she might be able to work as a short-order cook.

The idea of a person with severe dyslexia slapping together dinners based on scribbled order slips from hurried waitresses at a Denny’s makes her laugh today. But she had to find a way to work around her disability.

Jolene worked many jobs. She devised strategies to hide from employers the fact that though she is smart, likable, capable, talkative, witty, bold, friendly and quick, she can barely read. She got a job in retail sales where she memorized the entire store. Her sense

of direction and three-dimensional space is acute, so she got a job delivering auto parts. She worked cleaning apartments. She dealt face-to-face when possible, and on the phone.

She did many, many jobs, always keeping her severe dyslexia a secret, until a friend of the family mentioned an opening at Lewis-McChord, with Professional Contract Services, Inc., an AbilityOne and SourceAmerica partner.

“Now, for the first time in my life,” says Jolene, “I can feel comfortable saying, ‘I have dyslexia. I’m not good at spelling at all. If you have a question we’ll try to figure it out together. I can’t read my own writing, work with me.’ As a result, my confidence level has gone from, ‘Well, I guess I’m retail sales because that’s all I can do,’ to: ‘Give me some time, and some help, and a little understanding, and I don’t think there’s anything on this planet that I can’t do.’” ■