

Getting the skills to get a job -- and give back



When Katherine Crocker graduated from Bridgewater State College in 2009 with a degree in English and Communication studies, she, along with her peers, graduated into one of the worst economies in decades.

Crocker went on many job interviews but struggled to get a job. The fact that Crocker, who is now 24, is visually impaired, "didn't help" said Crocker. "Everyone was having a hard time getting a job and employers wanted the simplest, easiest fit."



Crocker did an internship at a printing press and was hoping for full time employment there but the employer did not have the funding to offer her a job. But Crocker, who had been involved with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind since high school, heard about Vocational Opportunities in Communication Education (VOICE), a job training program the MCB was developing with the Talking Information Center (TIC) Network, a statewide radio reading service. MCB received \$1 million in stimulus funding for vocation rehabilitation services to develop the program.

"I kept an eye on the program and when I heard they were starting, I jumped on it," said Crocker. She interviewed for a position in July and is now one of the four trainees in the first 12-week session of the program. According to Crocker, she has always wanted to be involved in a radio studio.



"This is my dream job. I consider myself lucky to get into the first program," said Crocker. I am so thrilled and blessed to be part of this program." As part of the program, Crocker has done on the street interviews, she has covered events with the New England Eye mobile clinic and she has interviewed an expert in Canada about GPS technology. She has received hands-on experience in the custom-built radio studio at MCB, which has been modified for use by those who are visually impaired. She is learning how to create a radio program, edit it and produce it.

"This program has meant so much to me," she said. "It is hard to be unemployed and disabled. It is giving me work experience, the opportunity to network and there is no end to the skill set I am learning." Crocker also appreciates the opportunity VOICE is giving her to demonstrate her skills to the greater community. "Everyone is getting educated in this process, including the public, who is learning what we are capable of doing."