



# Success Story Brief

## Wendy Hsu: Moving toward the Dream

### National Technical Assistance Center

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### Mission:

To increase employment opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with disabilities nationwide.

### Based at:

University of Hawaii  
at Manoa, Center on  
Disability Studies

### In collaboration with:

Hawaii Centers for  
Independent Living  
  
Hawaii Vocational  
Rehabilitation and  
Services for the Blind  
Division

### Funded by:

U.S. Department of  
Education  
Rehabilitation Services  
Administration

*Prepared by Maggie Leedy and Wendy Hsu*

*Courtesy of TransCen, Inc.*

*The following brief is the first in a series of success stories of individuals with disabilities aided by organizations and agencies supported by the National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities (NTAC-AAPI-- <http://www.ntac.hawaii.edu/>). The first section of the brief describes an outreach worker's experiences with Ms. Wendy Hsu, a consumer at the Maryland branch of TransCen, Inc. Impressed by Ms. Hsu's dedication and perseverance, she offers this inspirational story. Ms. Leedy's introductory comments are followed by the text of a speech Ms. Hsu shares from a National Summit on Increasing Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, on September 16, 2003, in Washington, D.C.*

### Introduction

by Maggie Leedy, TransCen., Inc.

As a result of our outreach efforts, sponsored by the National Technical Assistance Center for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities (NTAC-AAPI), consumer Wendy Hsu became involved with Project Advance, a program designed to assist job seekers with disabilities enter careers in finance and technology industries. Project Advance is operated by TransCen, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities, in conjunction with the local One Stop Career Center, in Montgomery County, Maryland. Ms. Hsu is a 44 year-old, Chinese-American, woman with cerebral palsy and significant hearing loss. She has an advanced education, talent, and a strong desire to work. However, she also has a great amount of self-doubt, as the attached speech she delivered at an NTAC-AAPI event indicates.

When Ms. Hsu began coming regularly to the One Stop Center, she availed herself of all the services offered. Wendy Hsu took advanced Microsoft Access and Excel classes to build her resume and increase her job skills, enrolled in job search and interviewing classes, and used the resource room diligently, seeking a job in Finance. Additionally, because of her hearing impairment, Project Advance encouraged Ms. Hsu to use her self advocacy skills to request hearing aids from her counselor at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, to improve her ability to perform at job interviews and eventually on the job.

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This process took more than six months. During this time she applied for many finance jobs both in the private and public sector.

As she continued to apply and interview for jobs her frustration grew, because she was not offered any positions. With encouragement, guidance and support from Project Advance, however, she diligently continued her employment pursuit. Project staff helped Ms. Hsu refine her resume, counseled her on job interviewing techniques, and arranged temporary internships to build her resume. Recently, her persistence and preparation finally paid off. After receiving a lead about a company seeking candidates with backgrounds in Information Technology (IT) and finance for positions in the Washington, DC area, staff advised Ms. Hsu to send her resume.

She was contacted the next day and asked to complete an online questionnaire, after which she was called for a telephone interview for a financial analyst position. Because she has difficulty with hearing and worries about her English and speech difficulties, the interview was conducted from the Project Advance office on speaker phone. As an accommodation, the interviewer agreed to allow a Project Advance staff to listen and clarify Ms. Hsu's responses if necessary. She passed the phone interview with flying colors and was asked to come in for a subsequent on-site interview.

To illustrate her dedication to the job search, Ms. Hsu took a taxi to the interview, spending \$129.00 because there was no public transportation available to the interview site. She was offered a job on the spot. Wendy Hsu is now a Financial Analyst at Computer Science Corporation, receiving full benefits, a security clearance, and a salary of \$30,000 a year.

The text of her speech, given at a National Summit on Increasing Employment Opportunities for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities, on September 16, 2003, in Washington, D.C., illustrates that Ms. Hsu has come a long way and is on the way to achieving her dream!

## **In her own words**

### **My personal experiences in seeking employment**

by Wendy Hsu

Speech given to attendees of the AAPI Employment Summit

Washington, DC: September 16, 2003

Today, I am going to talk about a few issues that affected me as a disabled person. Being a disabled and Chinese American whose primary language is not English, I am faced with many problems, such as how to study in college, how to get employment, how to get hired, and how to keep the job. My barriers are not limited to my physical disability. I have to deal with language, cultural issues, and job skills.

I have a B.S. degree in Finance from [the] University of Maryland, but I have difficulty in getting a job because of my physical appearance. I believe that physical appearance is important to some employers. I often do not make a good initial impression with interviewers because of my disability. Even when I present myself professionally, my physical appearance is still a major obstacle. For example, I feel very nervous when an interviewer looks at my deformed face. I often feel as if that is all an interviewer sees of me. Most of the time, I feel like interviewers judge my work performance based on initial impression—that is my physical disability, not my ability. Perhaps they do not believe that a disabled person can work hard and learn quickly too. My job interview experiences have been mostly negative. I felt a major part of it is because I am a disabled person. I have friends and counselors who help me to deal with these issues. But in the real world, when you

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face with a potential employer, you have to behave certain ways. You have to work extra hard to prove that you are capable of functioning normally like other people.

The second barrier is language. I was born in Taiwan. When I first came to the United States, I did not speak a word of English. During the early part of learning English, my vocabulary was limited. This hindered my ability to seek a job. Later on, when I attended school and learned to speak proper English, I was still faced with other problems. How would I overcome the physical disabilities? I have mild hearing loss where I cannot hear well if an interviewer speaks too fast. In addition, my speech impairment is another obstacle for me when I go for a job interview. I feel very frustrated that I cannot express my idea clearly during the interview. Also, I move slowly and cannot respond to a question quickly. Sometimes, I can feel that an interviewer gets frustrated with me.

Getting the right training can also be difficult. For example, I had to take a typing test when I sought employment at a local temporary agency. Since I could only type 25 words per minute, which was too slow for most office clerical jobs, I was rarely called back for an interview. They need people who could type 40 words per minute. I practiced my typing many times, but I could not reach their standard.

Sometimes I think life is not fair to a disabled person like me. I get upset easily because of these problems. I am also lucky because I have the support of friends, a college counselor, and career advisors. They encourage me to have confidence in myself. Self-confidence is a big issue for me. In college, I struggled with this problem. I was afraid that I would not do well in a required course. It was a speech class. My fear was that no one could understand my English. I speak English with a thick accent. But I finally overcame that fear and passed the speech class.

While my employment experiences were mostly negative, one employer made a difference. He was a personnel specialist at Montgomery College where I worked for four years. He saw beyond my disability and allowed me the opportunity to prove myself. He understood about my disability and was willing to take the time to explain the work. At the end of my contract, I was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for outstanding and dedicated service by the office.

I believe that most disabled persons, like me, are willing to work and work harder in order to get profit for the company and achieve their career goals. What we need is a chance to grow and to reach those goals. I have brought my resume and would be happy to talk to anyone interested in hiring a motivated talented financial assistant.

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