

## The Voice, *The Official Newsletter of SNA*

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### Welcome!

You are reading *The Voice*, a newsletter published by The Special Needs Alliance. Our purpose is to provide information--and answers--about special needs planning for family members and professionals. We hope this newsletter helps you. We invite your questions, suggestions and comments (please understand that we can not give individualized legal advice on the basis of an e-mail inquiry). We also encourage you to forward our newsletter to others who might benefit from the information here, or who might have similar questions.

### International Attention Focused on Disabilities



Members of the Special Needs Alliance see their mission as working to help protect individuals with special needs. Even more fundamentally, we strive to maximize the personal potential of every individual with whom we come into contact. That can take the form of working for better care and treatment, advocating for more personal autonomy, or even helping maximize the possibility that an individual can "graduate" from public benefits programs and become completely, or more nearly, self-sufficient.

The integration of individuals with special needs into the workforce is an international issue, as a recent initiative from the United Nations demonstrates. At a press conference at UN headquarters in New York on December 3 (the [UN International Day of Disabled Persons](#)), officials announced that Spain became the tenth country to [ratify](#) the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (Spain also ratified the [Optional Protocol](#) providing for UN committee regulation of the Convention). The next day, in fact, Namibia became the eleventh to ratify the Convention, joining Bangladesh, Croatia, Cuba, Gabon, Hungary, India, Jamaica, Panama and South Africa.

The press conference included presentations from Judy Young, Vice President of the [National Business and Disability Council](#), and Chris Sullivan, Vice President for Special Needs Financial Services at Merrill Lynch & Co. Both speakers advocated for stepping up worldwide efforts to bring persons with disabilities into the workplace. Studies cited by Mr. Sullivan indicate that global employers predict a shortfall of over 30 million skilled workers by 2010, growing to 56 million in the following decade. With unemployment higher than 65% in the United States for individuals with disabilities, noted Mr. Sullivan, one partial solution is obvious: train and employ those with disabilities, and implement the workplace changes necessary to help them be productive.

Mr. Sullivan's own circumstances are instructive. Though he was born

with impaired hearing, for two decades he has worked at Merrill Lynch in an environment that encourages diversity, training for those with disabilities and those who work with employees and customers with disabilities, and accommodations where necessary. The result, for him and for other employees with disabilities, has been utilization of "proven skills and talents that were previously ignored or unrealized," said Mr. Sullivan.

Merrill Lynch's work toward integration of those with disabilities has focused not only on employees, but also on customers. Mr. Sullivan is director of a [special needs outreach program at Merrill Lynch](#), and he has helped develop a core group of financial advisers with particular interest and emphasis in working with those with disabilities and the families who are planning for their future -- and present -- care.

We at the Special Needs Alliance are pleased to work with Mr. Sullivan, Merrill Lynch, and a growing number of other financial and planning companies emphasizing the needs of those with disabilities. We are eager to see the trend spread nationwide and worldwide.

Incidentally, the United Nations [press conference](#) was recorded and is available online. You can also read the [press release](#) for more information. According to the United Nations, the Convention "reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

**About this Newsletter:** We hope you find this newsletter useful and informative, but it is not the same as legal counsel. A free newsletter is ultimately worth everything it costs you; you rely on it at your own risk. Good legal advice includes a review of all of the facts of your situation, including many that may at first blush seem to you not to matter. The plan it generates is sensitive to your goals and wishes while taking into account a whole panoply of laws, rules and practices, many not published. That is what The Special Needs Alliance is all about. Contact information for a member in your state may be obtained by calling toll-free (877) 572-8472, or by visiting [www.specialneedsalliance.com](http://www.specialneedsalliance.com).