

## **Charles E. (*Charlie*) Knight**

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### **VISTA (*Volunteer In Service To America*) Employment position skills.**

At about the late spring of 1970 I was introduced to the VISTA program and applied. I was selected for a job through the Urban League of Pittsfield, MA. This was a Volunteer in Service to America job and I think I got some sort of a stipend after some training. I had to report hours and when I got the Tree Cress 30 day job through the state of Massachusetts those hours were modified to accommodate both positions.

I had to be at the Tree Crew job from about 7AM through 3:30 or 4PM. By about a half hour after finishing one job I was at the other on. I think it was at the Jewish Community Center, which also hosted some classes at Berkshire Community College when its original campus on Fenn street got crowded. So I knew the facility from taking classes there. The whole country was still in turmoil after the summer of 1969 and some wild things were happening. I set up shop and would get the daily paper delivered and would let others look at most of the other section before I got there and each day I combed the employment sections. I also looked at what other jobs the paper said would be opening up.

People would come to me and we created an intake form telling about them and what skills they possessed and what type of employment they had in the past. We also helped them with resume writing and writing cover letters and such. They were also welcome to use our telephone to call back employers and make other employment search related calls.

I would do the intake, then see if I could match up that person with a job and often call the employer and if it seemed like a good match say a good word for the prospective employee and find the person I should have them contact to have an interview. It was 1970 and the "Unemployment Office" could do pretty much nothing but take their names and post job openings as they came in. I did much of what we call at One Stop Career Center now. The success rate was very good and the program was working well. This was a sort of a "drop in center" that I was working out of.

Some people decided one day to use the center inappropriately with some candles and incense and I think something that the Jewish people felt profaned the place. I think swastikas might have been involved as well. The point is we were "evicted overnight" as you might say and I went to the Urban League office to try and complete the few weeks of time in this program I had. BUT without the drop in center many of the people lost track of us and then the program came to an end. I really think much of it ended because of these irresponsible acts by a few.

I enjoyed the work and have at times used the same skills to find out what likes and skills a person has now and is willing to learn about and then match them up with employment opportunities available.

You also need to be something of a "cheerleader" to encourage some folks that come by your spot actually thinking they have nothing to offer and have hit a permanent dead end. But I loved being able to hook people up with a method of getting the employment, and hence the income, to live and to work on fulfilling their hopes and dreams.

I am very proud of the work I did then in this jobs position, and at the same time very ashamed of the unthinking and selfish actions of others that profaned the space and good will of people and the reaction was to shut down a good program along with some other sort of questionable ones, a bit early.