

Making a Difference Magazine

A Quarterly Magazine of the Georgia Council on
Developmental Disabilities

Real Homes. Real Careers. Real Learning.
Real Influence. Real Support.

Spring 2016

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On the Cover: In recognition of the 18-year legacy of Disability Day at the Capitol, our commemorative cover displays a collage of photos taken over the years, including the last Disability Day in 2016.

On the back cover: (Top Photo) Ted Jackson, a Get Out The Vote strategist, addressed advocates on the last

Disability Day, emphasizing the importance of the disability vote. (Bottom Row) Photos of previous Disability Days.

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, a federally funded state agency, works to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play and worship in Georgia communities.

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How to Reach Us

Letters to the Editor

Letters should include the writer's full name, address, phone number, and may be edited for the purpose of clarity and space.

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GCDD VIEWPOINT

Successful Advocacy

This has been a good year! As I write, the 2016 General Assembly is still meeting but we can expect \$3.7 million in new funds to increase the rates for the Independent Care Waiver Program. This means that individuals with significant physical disabilities can pay direct support professionals a rate that will allow them to hire quality staff. Many struggle to find attendant care and better rates should help. The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act will soon become law and provide families a way to save money without endangering an individual's benefits. Individuals can use the funds in these accounts to purchase a new van, buy supported employment services or pay tuition for inclusive post-secondary

education programs like the one available at Kennesaw State University.

Our success came because there was help and support from legislators, individuals, families, advocates and providers. It was a coalition of people working on Employment First, the waiting lists, ABLE and other issues that came together; attended Advocacy Days; and met with their legislators to explain why we needed more money or legislation.

Almost 3,000 people attended the 18th and final Disability Day at the Capitol. As I said there, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) believes our advocacy can be more effective through supporting smaller and more frequent efforts. The purpose of Disability Day was to connect individuals and families with their legislators. This cannot happen when there are 3,000 people gathered at the Freight Depot. Instead, we

hope that groups of 25 to 50 people will attend Advocacy Days where they can learn more about the issues and get a chance to speak with their State Senator and Representative. This should help us in building a network of people statewide who have relationships with elected officials and can share their story. We thank all who have attended Disability Day and hope you will attend at least one advocacy day next year.

We can only go so far in our advocacy efforts unless we have elected officials who support our cause. This November, not only will we elect a new President, but many other elected offices will be filled. A coalition of advocacy organizations is working to support efforts to make sure that people with disabilities go to the polls and vote. People with disabilities are the second largest minority and those running for office should take notice that if you want our vote, you need to support our efforts.

Make sure you know where the candidates stand on issues important to people with disabilities.

Finally, as this edition goes to print look for information about GCDD's new strategic plan. We will need your input to make sure we continue on the right track. I also want to say thank you to Caitlin Childs who is leaving GCDD after six years. We wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors.

Remember that GCDD is here to assist you. Check out our website and join our advocacy network so that you can stay informed. We hope you enjoy reading this magazine and we want to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts and comments about the magazine by writing to our Editor at valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov

Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD

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IN THE NEWS

Tommy Hilfiger Debuts Adaptive Clothing Line

Tommy Hilfiger, one of the country's major clothing designers, is launching a line of apparel just for children with special needs. Tommy Hilfiger released a line of adaptive clothing that is comprised of items that look just like clothing in the company's regular spring collection, but include magnets, velcro and other modifications to allow for easy on and off for kids with disabilities.

The items are also priced the same as the versions for children without disabilities.

For the clothing line, Tommy Hilfiger collaborated with the nonprofit Runway of Dreams. Founded by Mindy

Scheier, the group works to increase the availability of fashionable clothing for kids with special needs. The idea came to her after adapting jeans for her son Oliver who has a rare form of muscular dystrophy and wears leg braces.

Find out more on Tommy Hilfiger's Adaptive Clothing line here:

<http://usa.tommy.com/shop/en/thb2cus/search/kids-runway-of-dreams-adaptive-clothing?icid=hp:desktop:story1:RODSHOPNOW:022316>

Source: Disability Scoop

Emergency Rooms Go Sensory-Friendly

alled REACH, or Respecting Each Awesome Child Here, a new program at Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, FL is helping to identify kids who have autism from the moment they enter the emergency room and accommodates their special needs until they leave.

Colorful REACH signs alert the parents of the program. The word REACH is added to the kids' chart to alert the staff. Families are offered a separate – and much more quiet – waiting area, where kids have access to toys, sensory brushes, iPads and headphones.

Nemours has been rolling out a program in its emergency department that aims to eliminate unnecessary stimulation for kids who have autism spectrum disorder or other behavioral and developmental conditions.

<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2016/02/23/emergency-rooms-sensory/21946/>

Source: Disability Scoop

Siblings with Disabilities Play Music through Assistive Technologies

Being born with a developmental disability did not stop eight-year-old Danielle and 10-year-old Christopher Fairchild from pursuing their love for music.

Both children, who were adopted from China, are missing all or most of their dominant hands. They use assistive technology to play musical instruments like the cello, and a viola adapted from a violin.

They received support from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's orthotics and prosthetics division, which has helped the two Fairchild children overcome challenges brought on by their physical disabilities to successfully play the instruments.

<http://www.fox5atlanta.com/health/fox-medical-team/111094142-story>

Source: FOX5 Atlanta

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[AROUND GCDD](#)

GCDD's Real Communities Initiative Receives National Award

The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) will present its 2016 Full Community Inclusion Award to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) for its Real Communities Initiative at the AAIDD Conference in June in Downtown Atlanta.

This award recognizes culturally responsive programs that have succeeded in full community inclusion and participation.

“We are excited and grateful for this recognition,” said

GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson. “We share this with our Real Communities Community Builders, partners, GCDD Council and staff who continue working towards an inclusive community for Georgians with and without disabilities.”

The AAIDD conference theme is The Meaning of Professional in an Era of Change and will feature seven pre-conference workshops, an opening reception featuring Georgia luminaries in the disability movement, three plenary sessions, 30 concurrent sessions and several post-conference workshops. Professionals, family members and self-advocates are welcome for both the pre- and post-conference workshops (separate registrations) and the main conference.

AAIDD conference program and registration is available here: www.aaid.org

Basmat Ahmed receives Dottie Adams Community Organizer Award

Basmat Ahmed, Real Communities Community Builder for the Clarkston International Garden, received the newly minted Dottie Adams Community Organizer Award at the Georgia Winter Institute (GWI), held January 24 – 27, 2016 in Columbus, GA.

“We wanted to select someone who is mission driven and builds and supports a diverse, inclusive community – the great qualities that Dottie has brought to our disability community across the State,” said Stacey Ramirez, state director of The Arc of Georgia. “We were excited to present this award to Basmat as she exemplifies Dottie’s spirit in the work she is doing in her local community.”

Originally the GWI Community Organizer Award, it was renamed in honor of Dottie Adams, GCDD's Individual and Family Support Director, who is also one of the original founders of GWI.

Update on GCDD's Five Year Plan

After receiving feedback from the online survey and public forums in regards to what the disability community would like to see in services and supports, GCDD is now drafting goals and objectives for its Five Year Strategic Plan (2017-2021).

The goals and objectives will be released for public comment in May 2016. Stay updated by signing up for our news and alerts at www.gcdd.org

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Governor Deal Speaks at 18th Annual Disability Day at the Capitol

The following is a transcript of the remarks given by Gov. Deal at Disability Day.

Your theme this year is The Disability Vote –Feel The Power. That is an appropriate theme to have in this election year cycle. I would encourage all of you to register to vote and then to use that power to vote in primaries and at the general election. This will be a busy year in all of those cycles of the election process so it is an appropriate time for that to be your theme for the year.

I also want to thank all of those who have sponsored legislation and actually carried your efforts forward in the State General Assembly. For example, in my budget this year we are including 100 new NOW waivers and over

\$11 million to support the increased rates for the COMP waiver. We remain committed to serving people in the least restrictive environment as possible in order to obtain a high quality of life for everyone in our State.

Another important aspect of what is happening in Georgia is the progress that we are making of being able to enroll students with intellectual disabilities on our college campuses. Those colleges currently include Kennesaw State University, Georgia State University, East Georgia State College, Georgia Tech and Columbus State University. There will be others joining these including the University of Georgia.

We all remain committed to making sure that we have progress toward increasing the number of people with disabilities who actually can go to work. I'm happy to support the efforts of Chairwoman Katie Dempsey's study committee to establish the Georgia Employment

First Council. They will recommend to the General Assembly ways in which we can proceed in order to become an Employment First state.

In summary this is our goal: We want people who can live in real communities with real homes with real careers and with real learning opportunities. Thank you very much. I am now privileged to present to you a proclamation recognizing this special occasion. It is a proclamation for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

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FEATURE

Advocates Rally to Get Out The Vote at Last Disability Day

By Devika Rao

Celebrating 18 years of disability advocacy, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) hosted its final Disability Day at the Capitol on February 18 at Liberty Plaza in Downtown Atlanta. Over 3,000 people with disabilities and their allies came to draw upon the attention of their State legislators while giving voice to the issues and concerns of Georgia's disability community.

This year, the theme of Disability Day was The Disability Vote – Feel The Power. 2016 presents an opportunity for the disability vote to take center stage as the country enters another election year.

In 2016, there are 36 million eligible voters with disabilities in America. In Georgia, more than one million people have disabilities and approximately 652,000 are of voting age. The goal of Disability Day was to focus on

Georgia's disability community and its impact on the 2016 general election cycle.

Keynote speaker Ted Jackson, a Get Out The Vote strategist and California Foundation for Independent Living Centers community organizing director, emphasized the importance of the disability vote. He rallied the crowd to get out and vote to make lawmakers recognize how policy and legislative decisions directly impact the disability community.

According to a Rutgers University School of Labor and Management study, voters with disabilities were the second largest minority-voting bloc in the 2012 presidential election.

But, “how often do you hear the word “disability” and our concerns discussed on the think tank sessions of the cable news stations?” Jackson asked the crowd.

Jackson informed the crowd that by adding three million more disability votes, the disability community, “would become the largest minority-voting bloc in America. And at that point the media and our elected officials could no longer deny the size of our electoral power.” *(Read an excerpt from his speech on the importance of the disability vote in Expert Update on page 14.)*

“We need to vote. Our voice matters,” said GCDD member Nandi Isaac of Macon, GA from amongst the crowd of attendees. Isaac has attended all 18 Disability Days. “A lot of people have disabilities and our issues are just as important,” she said.

Following Jackson, the crowd welcomed Governor Nathan Deal, who has been a guest of Disability Day since he took office in 2011. He continued to encourage the crowd to vote this election season and also spoke about the budget proposals for the disability community.

This year, Deal proposed a record \$23.7 billion spending budget to the Georgia General Assembly. For the disability community, he announced that it includes adding 100 New Options Waivers (NOW) and over \$11 million to support the increased rates for the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program (COMP) waivers.

“We remain committed to serving people in the least restrictive environment as possible in order to obtain a high quality of life for everyone in our State,” said Deal. Deal then presented a proclamation to GCDD Chair Mitzi Proffitt that declared that March will be recognized as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in the State of Georgia.

Senator Greg Kirk (R – District 13) reflected on Disability Day, an event he has attended for 16 years.

“This is very near and dear to my heart. I know many of

you in the crowd. I have worked with you and your families,” he said. “It is important that you continue to come down to the Capitol, meet with your legislators one-on-one, and let them know what you go through as a family when you have a child or a loved one with a developmental disability. Come and educate us so that we can make good laws, pass the ABLE Act and other things in the future to help take care of families.”

And no one understood the importance of family assistance more than Shandra Wilson of Douglasville. Wilson is a grandparent and attended to advocate on behalf of other grandparents and their grandchildren.

We are retired and already on a limited income,” said Wilson. “We need the support to make sure our grandchildren get what they need. There’s not a lot of housing, some of the children are on special diets and

there are not a lot of integrated programs that can support our kids.”

Mittie Cooper, of Lakewood, agreed. “We are here to advocate that grandparents or other family members and guardians get the same support as foster care parents.”

In addition to family support, many advocates also came to support the passage of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. The legislation would allow for people with disabilities and their families to save money without losing their Medicaid or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. It received support from other legislators who took time to address the crowd, giving a special mention to the ABLE Act.

At the time of this writing, the ABLE Act was coming up for a vote in the Georgia General Assembly.

Frequent guest of GCDD's Disability Day Sen. John Albers (R – District 56) stated that along with Sen. Kirk, he will “support to pass the ABLE Act.”

Sen. Butch Miller (R – District 49) visited and mingled with the crowd and Rep. Sharon Cooper (R – District 43) reminded the crowd to vote this election season.

“We are working together to better your life in Georgia because we want all Georgians to have the opportunity to work, to live independently, to play and to enjoy their life to their fullest capability in Georgia,” said Cooper. “You have to be involved in the legislative process. You have to have your voice heard.”

Additionally, GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson announced that this Disability Day would be the last one GCDD would host, but it will focus on the spirit of

advocacy to continue making an impactful change for Georgia's disability community.

“I am sad that is the last Disability Day,” Isaac said. “We need this day to advocate and make our voices heard.”

Similarly, GCDD Council member and longtime advocate Heidi Moore who was present with her son, Jacob, has attended all Disability Days at the Capitol.

“I remember Disability Day in 2005,” she said. “I, and many other advocates, spoke about the Katie Beckett Waiver to fight against the sliding scale that would affect many families. We advocated and fought for three years, and we won. It was that collective power of advocacy that makes Disability Day so important.

“So, it's a bittersweet moment for us advocates,” she continued. “It was a way for people with disabilities, their families, caregivers and supporters to come and be

together. It was a family reunion, of sorts. It is sad to see it end, but what GCDD is trying to accomplish in building relationships with decision makers is key to progress for disability rights.”

The focus will be placed on Advocacy Days, which the Council is aiming to grow. The incremental two-year phase-in of GCDD Advocacy Days has built stronger advocates who are likely to impact lawmakers more effectively.

“The purpose of Disability Day was to connect you with legislators. Our new framework for legislative advocacy will allow GCDD to support more intensive, targeted advocacy trainings and coordinate visits to the Capitol for more participants,” said Jacobson. “We realized that people want to be better informed about the issues they care about in order to be effective when speaking to legislators, whether at the Capitol or in their communities,

and they want more opportunities to meet with legislators when the General Assembly is in session.”

This year, GCDD hosted seven Advocacy Days from January to March.

Before the crowd marched back to the Georgia Freight Depot for lunch, Dawn Alford, GCDD’s public policy director, briefed the crowd on what is happening in the current legislative session. (Read the complete legislative wrap up on page 16.)

Disability Day kicked off at the depot where attendees made signs, viewed exhibits and participated in activities that included:

- Voter registration
- Demonstrations of accessible voting machines designed for persons who are blind, low-vision, deaf, hard of hearing or wheelchair users.

- Georgia Disability History Archive: a project of the Georgia Disability History Alliance, a coalition of advocates and organizations working to preserve and celebrate Georgia’s rich disability history. (See more about the Alliance in the right hand sidebar.)

Trace Haythorn, GCDD Council member and parent advocate, led a moment of silence honoring Georgia’s “Fallen Soldiers” and recently deceased disability advocates.

To keep the spirit of Disability Day at the Capitol alive, GCDD is also seeking memorabilia from the past 17 years of the advocacy event for the Georgia Disability History Alliance.

“We want to make sure all of the history of the disability movement here in Georgia is told,” said Jacobson. “There is an opportunity for further generations to know the work

that you have done not only these last 18 years, but the last 50 years.”

Georgia Disability History Alliance is an alliance of advocates and groups working to preserve and celebrate Georgia’s disability history. History links us with our past and helps us understand who we are.

From families seeking to understand their personal history to researchers searching for answers, having access to disability history resources impacts many people and extends beyond the boundaries of our State. We are each stewards of this rich history and have a role to ensure that it is available for generations to come.

Visit our website at www.historyofdisability.com

Please consider donating memorabilia from any of the previous Disability Days to our history archive in care of GCDD.

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FEATURE

The Disability Guide to Voting in the 2016 Election

Voting is one of our most important rights and civic duties as citizens living in a democracy. For the disability community, it's important to continually challenge the barriers to voting and not be forgotten as a critical voting bloc. When you participate in the election process, you help pave the path toward progress for people with disabilities.

In Georgia, more than one million people have disabilities and approximately 652,000 are of voting age.

The following is a guide on voting for people with disabilities from the office of the Georgia Secretary of

State, with the deadlines to pay attention to this election season.

How do I know if I am eligible to vote?

In order to participate in the voting process in Georgia, you must be a citizen of the United States; a legal resident of Georgia and of the county in which you plan to vote; and 18 years of age by Election Day. If you are unsure of your registration status, check on your status through the Secretary of State's website at <http://mvp.sos.state.ga.us/> or contact your county voter registration office at <http://sos.georgia.gov/cgi-bin/countyregistrarsindex.asp>. You may also contact the Secretary of State's office at 404.656.2871 or (V/TTY) 404.656.1787 for information.

How do I know if I am registered to vote?

Visit My Voter Page at <http://mvp.sos.state.ga.us/> and you can check your voter registration status, find designated poll locations and directions, early voting locations, access mail-in applications and ballots, get information on elected officials, find registration information on file with the county office and get a sample ballot for the upcoming election.

What if I get to my polling location and need assistance?

If a voter with a disability is unable to sign his or her name; to see or mark the answers on the ballot; use the voting equipment; or cannot enter the voting booth without support, they may bring someone to help them.

A voter with a disability can receive support from any individual EXCEPT his or her employer, representative of his or her employer or a representative of his or her union,

nor a poll worker or poll watcher, who is a resident of the precinct where the voter needing support is trying to vote.

Voters with disabilities can receive assistance from any other individuals including a mother, father, sister, brother, spouse, friend or child, and each individual assisting the voter with a disability must record his or her name on the elector's voter certificate.

Additionally, poll officers and workers are provided training regarding the use of voting equipment, procedures and all aspects of state and federal laws applicable to conducting elections.

For voters with disabilities who do not require support to vote from another individual, but require accommodation in the form of assistive technology, there are accessible touch screen voting equipment options provided at the polls that allow for assistance, but give more privacy and

independence for voters to select their choices. These options include:

- An audio ballot for those with visual impairment or who are blind, using headphones and a number keypad similar to an automated phone service.
- A magnifying feature is available on every touch screen voting unit in Georgia that allows you to enlarge the print on the ballot.
- Touch screen voting units that allow a voter to vote while sitting in a chair or wheelchair.

What do I need to vote?

Be sure to show up to your polling location prepared to vote. You must bring photo identification. The acceptable forms of photo identification include:

- Georgia driver's license, even if expired

- Any valid state or federal issued photo ID, including a free voter ID card issued by your County Registrar's Office or by the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS)
- Valid US passport
- Valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency or entity of the US government, Georgia or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this State
- Valid US military photo ID
- Valid tribal photo ID
-

What do I do if I do not have qualified identification?

For many in the disability community, not having qualified identification or a driver's license is often a barrier to the voting process. You can get either a FREE Georgia Identification Card for voting purposes only from the Department of Driver Services or a FREE Georgia

Voter Identification Card at your County Registrar's Office.

In order to get a Georgia Voter Identification Card, you will need the following:

- A photo identity document or a non-photo identity document showing your full legal name and date of birth
- Documentation showing your date of birth
- Evidence you are registered to vote in Georgia; and
- Documentation showing your name and the address of your principal residence
-

For more information visit, <http://sos.georgia.gov/cgi-bin/countyregistrarsindex.asp> to find your County's Registrar's Office or visit the Georgia Department of Driver Services website at

<http://www.dds.ga.gov/drivers/dldata.aspx?con=1749371755&ty=dl>

Are there other options besides voting on Election Day?

In Georgia, there are a couple of ways to submit your vote without ever having to battle the crowds on Election Day. Any voter can request a mail-in ballot without having to provide a reason.

To request a mail-in ballot, visit

http://sos.georgia.gov/elections/elections/voter_information/absentee.htm and print out the application form.

Mail, fax or take the completed form in person to your local County Board of Registrar's Office. It is important to request your mail-in ballot and return it as soon as possible to ensure it is received by the deadline, which is the close of the polls on the actual Election Day.

If you have a disability and need support to read and/or write your forms, you may get help when filling out your mail-in ballot application and the absentee/advance ballot form you will receive. Any person who assists an individual in his or her vote, must sign an oath that is printed either on the mail-in ballot envelope or on the application for mail-in-ballot, whichever is applicable. Georgia also offers its citizens the option to vote in person at the polls before the big rush on Election Day.

Early/advance voting is easy and convenient, since it allows you to vote on a day and time that works for you.

Important Links from the Office of the Secretary of State:

•Voters with Disabilities:

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/voters_with_disabilities

- My Voter Page:

<https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov/MVP/mvp.do>

- 2016 Elections and Voter Registration Calendar:

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/2016_election_dates

- Register to Vote:

<https://registertovote.sos.ga.gov/GAOLVR/welcome.do#no-back-button>

- Georgia Voter ID Requirements:

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/georgia_voter_identification_requirements2

- County Board of Registrars:

<http://elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/countyregistrars.do>

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EXPERT UPDATE

Why the Disability Vote Matters

There is an excitement in the air for people with disabilities. This is our year. This is our election year. It will be our election year if we take it for our own.

Last month the President began his final chapter at the State of the Union. It was apparent people with disabilities owe much to the past several years. We celebrated the Affordable Care Act and protection from discrimination based on pre-existing health conditions; the executive order to increase disability employment; Section 503; the Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment and Assistant Act regulations; the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; establishment of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency] Office of Disability Integration and Coordination; the 25th anniversary of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA); and recognizing intersectionality of diverse groups through the White House's Champions of Change programs. This progress is

a testament to our national community power through advocacy.

And yet while the President called out to communities across the nation, we did not hear the word “disability” echo in the House of Representatives chamber. Although we can track progress in our favor, we still encounter barriers to recognition and access. These barriers are evident through ongoing struggles to maintain International Association for Healthcare Security and Safety program sustainability; confusing building construction standards that seem to decrease access, legislative attempts to chip away at the ADA; fast evolving election policy and systems that leave voters with disabilities behind; an education system that continues to segregate students with disabilities and limits their access to accommodations delaying graduations and the collegiate experience; public transportation systems operating around the ADA; and a lack of funding for

independent living, inequality in employment opportunities, and too many more examples to mention.

In this election year, we are reminded that there are 36 million eligible voters with disabilities in America. How often do you hear the word “disability” and our concerns discussed on the think tank chit chat sessions of the cable news stations? How often do we hear our elected officials speak to our needs unless we have invited them to an event? Are we being overlooked? Let’s take a look at some numbers.

According to Rutgers University School of Labor and Management and their study on voters with disabilities, we were the second largest minority voting bloc in the 2012 presidential election – African-American voters were 17.8 million, voters with disabilities 15.6 million, and 11.2 million were Latinos. Which of those groups do we see discussed as a voting bloc on the news? We don’t

hear “disability,” do we? But in recent years we have been closing in on the voter turnout gap between voters with disabilities and voters without disabilities from 11% in 2008 to only 6% in 2012.

However if you apply our 2012 turnout to the number of eligible voters from our community only 40% of us voted. We don't need to operate at 100% to get the attention we deserve. If you remember from what I said, in 2012 we had a 6% gap between our turnout and that of voters without disabilities. That 6% translates roughly to about three million voters nationwide. When you think about it nationwide three million voters isn't a lot. That 6% is another 60 people for every 1,000 voters. That is not a huge jump. If we each got another 60 people for every 1,000 voters in our towns all across this State and in different states across the nation, we could make up that three million.

What would an extra three million voters look like? Well, we would increase our turnout to 18.6 million voters with disabilities, making our community the largest minority voting bloc in America. And at that point the media and our elected officials could no longer deny the size of our electoral power.

The point of this discussion today is not to draw comparisons or competition between our allies. After all, people with disabilities are black and white, women and men and transgender, Latino and Asian, short and tall, gay and straight, people of faith and people of ideology. We are the ultimate melting pot and the infinite rainbow.

So how do we begin to make this leap? How do we power up for it? By learning from our allies, our older brothers and sisters in social justice and solidarity that came before us. We are learning from the successes of the Suffrage Movement, from the rise of the Union Domination

through the Workers Rights Movement, the achievements of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the accomplishments of the Marriage Equality Movement, and we must take a careful look at the common denominators in the quest for triumph.

Through careful examination, the unifying activity for each of these communities was activating individuals into collective and measureable voting blocks. These groups participated in Get Out The Vote campaigns (what we call “GOTV”) and demonstrated to elected officials the ability to affect election results. This effect didn’t happen overnight for these groups. It took decades of painstaking detail and connecting with voters one-on-one and in blocs, finding out what motivates them and using those messages to drive them out to vote.

Beginning in small cells around the nation, each election cycle was an opportunity to grow their capacity larger

than the previous election until one day they captured the attention of candidates. Each of these groups can today approach the legislators from across the nation, courts and Congress to find a greater amount of success than our own community. In fact, although many of these groups are considered disability allies and partners, we have recently seen ourselves overshadowed sometimes by their goals and objectives. This is what we call “electoral power,” the ability to have a measured and visible effect on elections. This effect allows a community to be actors on the political stage with the elected officials who know that a group can deliver the votes that could determine their own futures in office. This power can be used to hold our officials accountable to the ballot box that elected them.

Communities who invest in building electoral power over time often find themselves on a Governor or President’s to-do list. How many of the groups that I talked about

today have we seen on the to-do lists of recent presidents? The goal here is not to paint a picture of conflict with our partners, but rather to challenge ourselves to build the same type of power for the disability community, to stand with similar footing among fellows, and negotiate for fairness and access with equal strength. Electoral power does not mean that barriers will stop rising in our path but it does mean that we will always advocate from a stronger position to break those barriers and increase access.

Ted Jackson is a Get Out The Vote strategist and California Foundation for Independent Living Centers community organizing director. He rallied the Disability Day crowd to get out and vote to make lawmakers recognize the impact of the disability community in legislation.

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A Look Back at the 2016 Legislative Session

By Dawn Alford

A major milestone of the legislative session, Day 30, or Crossover Day, occurred on February 29. Crossover Day is the deadline by which a bill must cross from its originating chamber to the other in order to have enough time to complete the entire bill process before the end of session.

On that day, the House and Senate worked tirelessly into the evening passing approximately 70 bills in total. Since then, four additional legislative days have passed. This update is current as of legislative day 34, and the session is scheduled to adjourn on Thursday, March 24.

Therefore, please be sure to go to www.gcdd.org and click on “Public Policy” to read the final legislative wrap

up edition of GCDD's legislative newsletter Public Policy for the People to see the final outcome of the budget and other highlights.

Now let's take a moment to see what has been accomplished for Georgians with disabilities so far during this session with a particular focus on GCDD's legislative priorities using the format of the GCDD legislative agenda.

Employment First

GCDD has been leading Georgia's Employment First coalition advocacy efforts to make Employment First policy and culture a reality in Georgia. In essence, this would mean that employment in the general workforce at or above minimum wage is the first and preferred option for all working age citizens with disabilities. Currently, the Georgia system creates many barriers for individuals with disabilities to work and way too many individuals

end up wasting away in institutions, day centers, sheltered workshops, jails or on their parents' couch without a way to contribute their gifts and talents to the broader world.

Last fall, Rep. Katie Dempsey (R – District 13) chaired a House study committee called the Post-Secondary Education & Employment Options for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. One of the primary recommendations of this committee was to “encourage the Governor’s office to enact an executive order to create an Employment First Georgia Council under the authority of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA).” Further, the recommendations stated that this body “should be tasked with creating a comprehensive strategic plan” on how to transition Georgia to an Employment First state.

On Thursday, February 11, over 50 people attended the Employment First Advocacy Day at the Capitol and told

their stories about why having a job is important to them. At GCDD's 18th and final Disability Day on February 18, Governor Nathan Deal announced his support for the Employment First Council. Specifically, the Governor said he is happy to support the efforts of Rep. Dempsey and her study committee to establish a Georgia Employment First Council hosted by GVRA, which will create recommendations about how Georgia should proceed as an Employment First state. That is another big step towards making Employment First the new reality for the disability community. GCDD looks forward to continuing the work with our partners and allies after the session to keep Georgia moving forward toward Employment First.

Inclusive Post- Secondary Education

Inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) provides opportunities for students who historically have had none. These programs change lives by making college

accessible for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Further, this education prepares them to live increasingly independent lives, pursue careers of their choice and to earn higher wages.

On Tuesday, February 2, we held an IPSE Advocacy Day at the Capitol. Representatives were present from all four IPSE programs as well as other grassroots advocates who asked legislators to invest in inclusive post-secondary education programs by doubling the legislative funding from \$200,000 to \$400,000. The Governor's budget recommendations for FY 2017 did not include any new funding for these programs, and unfortunately, neither the House nor the Senate added any new funding either. At print time, the final FY2017 budget allocations have not yet been finalized.

As we go forward, we must strive to ensure the sustainability of these programs, work to grow even more

programs across the entire State, and ensure that the many qualified and eager students who cannot afford this life-changing opportunity of inclusive post-secondary education have resources available to pay for these programs.

UNLOCK (formerly “Unlock the Waiting Lists!”)

We Need More DD Waivers

Out of the several Medicaid waivers that Georgia offers to those who qualify for this level of care, the New Options Waiver (NOW) and the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program (COMP) has by far Georgia’s longest waiting list. As of December 31, 2015, there are at least 8,304 individuals with developmental disabilities on this waiting list, based on data provided by the Department of Community Health. These individuals and their families are desperately hanging on and need Georgia to throw them a lifeline.

On Wednesday, January 20, we hosted a “We Need More DD Waivers” Day at the Capitol. Those who attended asked legislators to not only support the 100 new NOW waivers in Governor Deal’s recommendations for the FY 2017 budget, but also to increase those numbers to address the over 8,000 people on the waiting list. Specifically, advocates asked that legislators provide budget language to direct Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to convert 20% or \$4.75 million of unmatched state funds to Medicaid waivers. This would allow the State to access an additional \$10 million in federal funds and support up to 1,000 new waivers. While the House and the Senate did both support the Governor’s recommendation for 100 new NOW waivers, neither chamber included the neutral UNLOCK budget ask to convert any unmatched DD dollars to Medicaid waivers dollars to allow for additional drawdown of federal funds that could potentially be used, at least in part, to bring

more people into services.

Independent Care Program (ICWP) Rate Disparity

The Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) provides vital assistance to people with significant physical disabilities and traumatic brain injury to help them with daily tasks such as toileting, bathing, dressing, meals and light housekeeping. ICWP is the lowest reimbursed Medicaid waiver by far. Georgians on ICWP are in crisis because they cannot find and keep qualified caregivers at such a low rate. By the time home health agencies take their cut, caregivers often are paid only \$8-9/hour.

In his budget recommendations for FY 2017, the Governor did not include any new funding to address the ICWP rate disparity. On Wednesday, January 27, we hosted an ICWP Raise-the-Rate Advocacy Day in which advocates came and asked their legislators to raise the ICWP Personal Support rates to mirror the

CCSP/SOURCE Personal Support rates so Georgians on ICWP and their families could find and keep qualified caregivers.

Furthermore, individuals on ICWP, family members and ICWP providers joined together to provide public testimony on the crisis in this State due to the inequity of the rates compared to the other waivers. The House fully funded the UNLOCK request approving \$3,774,382 to increase funds for ICWP Personal Support rates to match CCSP and SOURCE program rates. The Senate agreed and kept the entire amount in their version of the budget. As of the print date, the final outcome of the FY 2017 is not yet known.

The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act (HB 768)

An ABLE Account is a savings account that will allow people with disabilities to save money for qualified

disability expenses without violating the \$2,000 asset limits that apply to eligibility for Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It is limited to individuals with significant disabilities who became disabled before age 26.

GCDD partnered with All About Developmental Disabilities (AADD) and Autism Speaks to co-lead the Georgia ABLE Coalition to pass HB 768, the ABLE Act in Georgia. Not only did we assist with the ABLE Act Advocacy Day hosted by AADD on Wednesday, February 24, but GCDD used its Wildcard End-of-Session Advocacy Day on Thursday, March 10 to lobby for the passage of HB 768 as well. As of the print deadline for this article, HB 768 has passed the House unanimously and is scheduled for a vote on the Senate floor. Be sure to check back on the GCDD final 2016 edition of Public Policy for the People to see what happens.

Change the Standard to Prove Intellectual Disabilities in Capital Punishment Cases (SB 401)

In 2002, the US Supreme Court said it is wrong to execute a person with intellectual disabilities because it violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. But right now in Georgia, it is extremely difficult for an individual to prove in court that they have intellectual disabilities. Georgia is the only one of the fifty states that requires a person to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that they have intellectual disabilities in capital punishment cases.

Caitlin Childs, GCDD's former Real Communities organizing director, in partnership with Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, The Southern Center for Human Rights, and Georgia Catholics Against the Death Penalty led the Proof to a Preponderance of the

Evidence (PAPE) Coalition to work on getting legislation to address the issue and change the standard of proof to “Preponderance of the Evidence.” Three teach-ins, a breakout session at the Georgia Winter Institute and a lobby day at the Capitol were held to advocate for this message. Sen. Elena Parent (D – District 42) introduced SB 401 on February 18 with bipartisan support. The goal for this session was to get a bill introduced. The coalition will debrief after the session to discuss strategy going forward to ensure a bill is passed in 2017 on this issue.

Support Georgians Who Care for Their Families: The Family Care Act

Many Georgians balance their work lives with caring for their families. The Family Care Act would enable Georgians who have earned sick leave to use up to five days of that leave to care for sick members of their immediate family. The Family Care Act does NOT add any additional sick days or require employers to provide

them; it only allows Georgians to use the sick days they've already earned to care for family members.

During the 2016 legislative session, hundreds of grassroots advocates emailed and went to the Capitol to ask their legislators to support the Family Care Act. SB 242 was heard in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on February 8, 2016. Supporters, including dozens of coalition partners and business supporters packed the room. Of the two individuals permitted to testify, the head of the Georgia Restaurant Association spoke in support of our bill, which passed on an 8-2 vote. Even with broad bipartisan support among Senators, we were not successful in getting SB 242 through Senate Rules Committee by the February 29 crossover deadline to get a vote in the full Senate.

We are encouraged about the support and momentum built in our first year of focusing on a Senate bill. GCDD

looks forward to continuing our work alongside dozens of other organizations in the Georgia Job Family Collaborative to discussing post-session strategy to prepare for next year's session.

In Other News

The Governor put in \$11.9 million in the DBHDD budget for FY 2017 to provide for six months of funding to reflect a provider rate increase for the COMP waiver based on the recommendations from the residential and respite services rate study. The House and Senate both agreed to keep this increase in the budget. Check back with GCDD as the final budget and other issues have not finalized as of the print deadline.

GCDD Says Thank You to Legislators and Grassroots Advocates

GCDD appreciates the time many legislators spent

hearing our issues, discussing the budget, and asking questions. Despite the fact that there are so many critical needs in Georgia, we are moving forward. Please stay connected to GCDD as this legislative session finishes and we begin planning for next year! Advocacy is truly a year-round process and we need YOU, the voices of Georgians with disabilities and their loved ones, to make a difference!

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FEATURE

The Next Five Years: How DD Councils Will Focus on Communities At Large

An Interview with AIDD Commissioner Aaron Bishop

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, along with all nationwide DD Councils, is currently

working on building a new Five Year Strategic Plan to serve the developmental disability community in the State.

The plan, once completed and adopted by the community and Council, will be submitted to the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) in August for approval.

During a visit to Atlanta, AIDD Commissioner Aaron Bishop spoke to Making A Difference about what the administration is asking DD (Developmental Disability) Councils to focus on to better serve their local disability communities through services and programs.

Aaron Bishop (AB): As the AIDD commissioner, it is one of my duties to come meet DD Council directors and talk to them about the future of programming and activities, where the administration is going and what

opportunities there may be for the DD Councils. The focus of this meeting is also on diversity and cultural linguistic competency that is one of our priority issues within Administration on Community Living (ACL), or specifically AIDD. We come out and talk about our expectations and infuse some of that knowledge to Council members so they see the direction in which we are going, but also learn from people to see what they're already doing.

Making A Difference (MAD): Tell us about where the administration is going and what it would like DD Councils to do.

AB: DD Councils are in a unique position because of what they are. They're conveners at the state level and they have the ability to bring in and bring individuals together to focus on policy issues of interest to the state and people of disabilities and/or the federal government

and to see how they could combine the three together. In AIDD, we are interested in diversity and cultural competency issues for a number of reasons. One, it's stated in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) that all of the services that we provide have to be culturally competent. And so are we doing that? We really don't have a way to tell if we are, so we're making a concentrated and specific effort to make sure that we are. We have specific funding for programming that has gone out to the community at large. This was a diversity leadership institute to build new leaders, but also for current leaders to recognize skill sets in others where the person may be different from you and it's not viewed as being a skill set.

MAD: Would you mind giving us some examples?

AB: There are specific cultures where you do not challenge authority. You don't ask specific questions or

do so in public, but what the typical leaders of our movement have been about is being the loud voice, being the change agent, and if that is not in your persona because culturally that is not acceptable, how do you still find leadership qualities in that individual?

They may be there, but if they're not the same as your qualities and what you value, you may not recognize them and pass over individuals who may be able to do a tremendous job leading, but do so in their own way.

MAD: Is this becoming a bigger topic of concentration because the population is diversifying?

AB: Yes. Demographics in the United States have changed. This year, the Department of Education has data that shows for the first time in US history, we had more students of color graduating from US high schools this past June than European-Americans.

And if we look at early intervention services, more than a majority of the kids going through early intervention services are kids of color or are multiracial.

So it's changing and how are we going to start providing services to youth and families who look completely different? We have not bridged that gap yet. Also, we don't know how many people of color are not connected to the service delivery system and not accessing services.

MAD: DD Councils are trying to bridge that gap. But, what does bridging that gap look like? How does that progress?

AB: Every state is different, and every state looks different. We're in Georgia and Georgia has an American Indian population, but it's very small. It's very different than what it looks like in New Mexico or Arizona. How it plays out is going to vary from state to state, but knowing

that entities are actually trying to address specific issues is what we're looking at doing. GCDD's Real Communities initiative is a great example of what we are talking about today.

That initiative has built bridges with diverse communities with cultural brokering, or finding an expert or bridge builder in a specific community that you can potentially work with, provide that person or that entity with seed money to be able to go out and do specific work. What's happening here in Georgia is one way to get it done, but it may not be appropriate for other DD Councils, but we want to talk about it as being a model.

We want DD Councils to bridge gaps and to figure out how they can start working with underrepresented groups and nontraditional populations and bring those individuals and groups into the fold, and that should be reflected in their Five Year State Plan and in their council activities.

MAD: As you said, states are all different demographically and culturally. Is there some kind of vision of what success looks like?

AB: Success is when it's built into a Council's normal operations so it's no longer something separate. It's just what they do on a daily basis. When they are going out and gathering information on what should be in the Five Year State Plan, they're not only going to the outskirts of Atlanta or uptown to talk to the communities there that are not living in poverty, but they're also going to the area where Martin Luther King Jr. was born and lived the later portion of his adult life. How are you gathering information from groups of people there to influence your state plan and then actually have that show up? When it's just part of what we do on a daily basis because that is the culture of the organization, that is a success story.

What is cultural competency?

Cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Culture implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group. Competence implies having the capacity to function effectively.

Five essential elements that contribute to a system's, institution's or agency's ability to become more culturally competent include:

1. Valuing diversity
2. Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment

3. Being conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact
4. Having institutionalized culture knowledge
5. Having developed adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of cultural diversity

These five elements should be manifested at every level of an organization including policymaking, administrative and practice.*

* Source: *The National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University: nccc.georgetown.edu/*

Aaron Bishop is the Commissioner of the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD).

Mr. Bishop has almost 20 years of experience working with and for individuals with disabilities in both the direct practice and public policy sectors. He was the executive director of the National Council on Disability from November 2010 until February 2013. In 2006, he received

a Kennedy Foundation Public Policy Fellowship to work on federal disability policy and legislation for the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

AIDD, under the Administration on Community Living, provides financial and leadership support to organizations in every state and territory in the United States to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families can fully participate in and contribute to all aspects of community life.

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PERSPECTIVES

Advocacy Days Empower Disability Community

GCDD hosted Advocacy Days at the Capitol during the legislative session this winter to let people with disabilities, their families and other stakeholders meet legislators and discuss what is important to them. Making A Difference followed up with advocates who participated in the initiative that included legislative advocacy training from GCDD Public Policy Director Dawn Alford and The Arc of Georgia's Stacey Ramirez. Read their stories below:

DD (Developmental Disability) Waivers Advocacy Day

Vikki and Christie Entrekin

Trion, GA

This was the first Advocacy Day my daughter, Christie, and I participated in. The DD Waivers Advocacy Day is not only important, but also very personal to us. We waited for two years to get waivers from the State, and there are families who have waited longer – some are still waiting. We have to advocate. We know our local Senator and Representative and wanted to meet them at the Capitol about this issue. I empower myself by researching how other states are handling the same issues and come prepared to share this information with the legislators. It is about letting the decision makers understand that people with disabilities are contributing citizens of the community. They are not asking for a free ride; they just want the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) Advocacy Day

Marnie Williams

Atlanta, GA

I participated in the IPSE Advocacy Day because I work with Excel at Georgia Tech, an IPSE program at the university. I know how important it is that we have legislative support in funding and expanding IPSE programs across the State. I have seen the impact that these programs have on all students who are involved. I wanted to be sure that my voice was expressed to advocate for better support. I have seen the tremendous impact that IPSE programs can have on a student's life – both students in Excel and degree-seeking students on Georgia Tech's campus. It's incredibly important that there is more financial support so that these opportunities are accessible to all students, regardless of financial status. The experience on Advocacy Day was amazing! I didn't expect "The Ropes" to be so hectic or for the legislators to be so open to conversation. We had one legislator, Rep. Henry Howard (D – District 124), sit with our group for 15 minutes. He asked questions about who we were, what impact IPSE programs had and then

finished the conversation by asking how he could help. I was blown away by his hospitality and willingness to listen. Before Advocacy Days, I never would have guessed that a representative would be so open to conversation and truly pay attention to the asks of the people he was representing. My biggest takeaway from participating in Advocacy Day was to ask clearly and boldly. Being precise and to the point is the best way to respect the legislator's time. It's also okay to make big asks. I have shared my experience with Rep. Howard with many people. Before participating in Advocacy Day, I did not think anything of advocating. I now see that advocacy really is important in ensuring that legislators are informed about the wants and needs of the community they are representing. The only way they will know is if we tell them, which is why I will continue to advocate. It is important to talk to your representatives. They actually listen.

*Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) Advocacy
Day*

Shanta Hogan

Jonesboro, GA

I participated in the Independent Care Waiver Raise the Rate Day, along with NOW/COMP Waiver Day and Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Day. As a community activist, it is my civic duty to be a voice for the voiceless; and stand up for those who cannot say it themselves. Being my first Advocacy Day, my experience was simply amazing. I felt as if I was a part of the legislative process. The training sessions were very informative. GCDD and The Arc [of Georgia] do a wonderful job making sure that each individual feels comfortable meeting with the legislators. I plan to use the experience to educate others and assist them in any way that I can. Participating in Advocacy Days was a life-

changing experience. I left feeling encouraged, motivated and empowered.

Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act

Jordan Hall

Atlanta, GA

I participated in the ABLE Act Advocacy Day, and it was the first time I advocated in this capacity. I am an individual with a disability, and as a junior at Georgia State University, the ABLE Act is an important issue for me. I learned valuable tools such as the best approach on how to speak to legislators about what issues are important to the disability community. The only way to create change is to participate and your disability can be used for empowerment. We can make a difference when we share the fight for each other's rights.

Death Penalty and I/DD Advocacy Day

Jameca McGhee

Atlanta, GA

Coming to the Death Penalty and I/DD (intellectual and developmental disability) Advocacy Day was personal for me. My father was on death row for 22 years, and he also had a disability. Although he passed away from a stroke, I still wanted to make a difference for other people. Like many other issues, this affects the family too.

Participating in this Advocacy Day gave me an opportunity to speak directly to Sen. Elena Parent (D – District 42) about the importance of this issue in the disability community. The legislators were open to listening and they really do care about these issues. I feel education is the number one way to make a difference. The more we can tell the story and how issues like these impact a person, family and community, the more we can help to change the system. I plan to take my advocacy

training and use the power of social media to inform and empower other people.

Employment First Advocacy Day

Hillary Hibben, (sister) Atlanta, GA and Debbie

Hibben, (mother) McDonough, GA

(advocating for Hannah Hibben)

Hillary: We participated in an Advocacy Day for Employment First Georgia (EFG). As members of Hannah's support system, we're no strangers to advocating on her behalf. However, for me, my advocacy has been outside the legal system. I've petitioned for Hannah to be treated fairly on the playground, for her to be included in "normal" school activities, for her to be addressed with dignity in restaurants, etc. And now, as Hannah transitions to a new phase of her life (i.e., finding a job/career), and as I become older and more educated, I understand "advocacy" in a new way. Hannah graduated

from high school last year and has since entered Success Academy in Henry County. The goal of Success Academy is for Hannah to find gainful, supported employment. We've known this struggle was coming for some time – and in the short time Hannah's been in this season of her life, the challenges have been many. There is great need for education. The EFG Advocacy Day provided a path for me to help Hannah's voice be heard in a more formal way – in a way that I could really see change happening and steps being taken.

People with developmental disabilities want – and deserve – equal rights. Unfortunately, we're discovering how hard it is to even get an employer to consider interviewing a candidate with so-called “special needs.” This is very much a generalization, but it seems like when an employer is approached with a prospect with developmental disabilities, a light flicks on. He gets scared. He doesn't want to deal with (what he perceives to

be) the drama, the liability, the wasted money on insufficient labor, etc. It all boils down to ignorance and fear. We're afraid of what we don't know. Again, this is not a notion that is new to us. It's been something we've been fighting against since before Hannah was even born. This was the first Advocacy Day for Hannah and me. Our mom has participated in previous years. The experience was very high-energy. The room of citizen advocates we were surrounded by inspired me. When we got to the Capitol Building, it was beyond bustling. It sounds cliché, but it was invigorating to get a glimpse of how our legal process works.

In our training sessions, I actually learned a lot about the EFG initiative. We can't speak on something effectively if we're not educated, so it was great to learn more. For example, I learned about Katie Dempsey's efforts and how we can ask our representatives to consider voting "yes" on her proposal. We also learned why it was

important to be specific about the goals of the EFG and what we're asking the representatives for. I'd definitely participate in another Advocacy Day. Also, the experience has given me more information to use when I talk to everyday folks.

I truly believe changing one person's perspective can change a lot. And, a large part of changing the culture takes place in our conversations and in the interactions we have with each other. I never miss an opportunity to educate someone or challenge their perspectives on individuals with special needs. And now I can speak to even more aspects of the struggle.

Debbie: As we walked toward the Capitol, the girls reminded me neither had visited there. I was flabbergasted that I, a mom of two native Georgians and public school career educator had been so “negligent.” Two highlights of the day were meeting with Sen. Rick

Jeffares (R – District 17) and Rep. Andrew Welch (R – District 110), both of whom I’d met previously. Sen. Jeffares once again came “to the ropes” and unhurriedly got re-acquainted with our family; we attend the same church. He was attentive, respectful and spoke directly with Hannah. Though Rep. Welch is not from our district, he’s from the same county and has a vested interest in disability rights – having tragically lost a younger brother with a developmental disability a number of years ago. We literally “stopped him in his tracks” in the hallway and he too was patient, attentive and focused on Hannah. As this was my second EFG advocacy day, I once again learned that our greatest asset is telling our story, “making it real” for the hearer. Hannah loves to work. She wants to work. She’s honest and dedicated – and doing a job makes her very proud. At Advocacy Day, she was also proud to talk to her representatives about her efforts to find a job. She also enjoyed being at the Capitol and learning more about the legislative process. And people

noticed her. It's important for Hannah and her support system to be present and visible.

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MIA'S SPACE

What's Your Backup Plan?

By Pat Nobbie, PhD

Lately I've been in a number of states as they work on amending waivers and program offerings for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In each location, we seek to move systems from "care-taking"

models to services that encourage and support employment and independent or supported living options. I'm concerned about her health and well-being. If she needs to come and live with me one day, my concern is that we can co-exist in our living space and that she'll listen to me when it comes to the serious stuff.”

Many individuals in these systems still live at home and many are in facility-based employment or day settings. In conversations or public comment forums in which we participate, what we hear most about from families is concern for the safety of their family member and their exposure to risk if they transition to new services and supports.

At dinner a few weeks ago with a good friend and fellow “single woman of a certain age,” I relayed these conversations and it caused us to consider our own safety and level of risk. Frankly, we wondered how many days it

would be before someone found us if we suddenly dropped dead in our own apartments? I work from home and travel each week and so does she. Eventually in each of our cases there would be a round of phone calls from people wondering why we missed a meeting or a flight, but who would eventually show up at our doors? Both of us have constructed backup plans for other people, she for the consumers she plans for, and me for Mia. But what about us? What is our backup plan?

It was supremely ironic when I realized that Mia is my backup plan, because she calls me every morning at 8:00 am and every night at 8:05 pm (I get called after Ruthie!). A couple of missed connections and she would be telling somebody I wasn't answering. It occurred to me I need to cascade my backup plan from these regular calls.

There is a tension and balance between safety and risk.

We learn to navigate it as we grow up, hopefully guided by people who love us. Most of us are allowed to keep broadening our circles of engagement, testing our boundaries, and when we retreat, it's usually because we have determined our own limits. For many people we support, we have decided for them what the boundaries and limits of engagement are, even as adults.

Changing this calculus is hard for parents, and it is also hard for providers who have financial and legal accountability. But in starting from an assumption of risk and vulnerability, we have limited the ability of individuals to engage in the community of support that would keep them safest.

Here's a question one of our consultants asked in a workshop I participated in with a team preparing to roll out significantly more liberating home and community-based choices for people. They are anticipating resistance

from parents. She said, “Let’s assume you are safe. Now what would you like to do?”

Of course we cannot abdicate our responsibility to keep people from harm. But once we have established reasonable safeguards, let’s ask the question.

“Now, what would you like to do?”

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REAL COMMUNITIES

Caitlin Childs Says Goodbye to Real Communities

By Caitlin Childs

I joined the GCDD staff in 2009 as the first director of the Real Communities initiative. I came with over 10 years of community organizing experience, an unwavering commitment to social justice and a strong willingness to

get my hands dirty, learn, grow and co-create with other Georgians. I never imagined my organizing work would lead me to a state agency and I had no idea what to expect.

Over the past six and a half years, I have lived and breathed Real Communities. I have had the privilege and honor of working alongside some of the most creative, open-hearted, committed and brilliant organizers I have ever known. I have seen relationships develop and have witnessed lives, families and communities change. Together, we have not only found ways to bring people with and without disabilities together in Georgia communities, but we have built deep relationships with one another that blur the lines of where our work ends and our commitment to one another as friends, chosen family and allies starts.

We have supported 12 communities around the State and expect to welcome two more this summer. We have seen youth working in their neighborhoods as Roving Listeners in Macon and have grown food together in community gardens in Clarkston and in Little Green Wagons in Savannah. We have traveled in minivans around North America eager to learn from the work and experiences of others. We have celebrated, laughed, cried and grieved together. We have welcomed new babies, celebrated marriages and said goodbye to beloved staff and partners.

We have put Mike Green's organizing motto of "Ready, Fire, Aim" into practice as we have taken risks and tried unorthodox approaches while always creating space to learn and reflect along the way. We have shared stories of our successes and failures while celebrating our failures in particular as robust learning opportunities. I have coached and cheered on Community Builders as they have grown and evolved in their work. I have seen their skills,

relationships and strategies deepen and flourish, some of whom have gone on to coach and support the development of Community Builders in their local communities. To say this is an honor is an understatement.

Transitioning out of this role is incredibly bittersweet. I very much believe in the solid foundation we created together during the first volume of the Real Communities story. I am eager to bear witness to the ways new and fresh leadership will move this work to the next level and will be listening for the new stories and lessons that will be learned along the way.

My role is changing but my commitment to this work, to Georgia's communities and to all of the people who have come into my life and heart along the way will remain. I know our paths will continue to cross as we continue to work to build communities in Georgia where all people

are seen, valued, included and celebrated. We are in this together for the long haul.

Caitlin Childs is the GCDD Real Communities organizing director.

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STRAIGHT TALK

I Love Today

By Mark Johnson

I had abdominal spasms that were so intense I was ready to call 911. However, just as quickly, they subsided. Thinking it was a bad urinary tract infection, I self-medicated, trying to continue on with my day and ignore the symptoms as best I could. Eventually, things got bad enough that I called my wife Susan and asked her to come home early to help me. I then slept for a while, waking up long enough to eat a little dinner before going straight

back to bed. Throughout the night, the nausea intensified, and by early Saturday morning, I was throwing up repeatedly.

“We’re taking you to the emergency room,” Susan declared. Good thing since a CAT scan revealed that my appendix had ruptured and that my body was growing more septic by the minute. My spinal-cord injury made it impossible for me to feel the intense pain that usually signals appendicitis. I spent the next three hours in emergency surgery. I would not recommend it as a way of celebrating Valentine’s Day.

During my recovery I had some time to reflect on my life and work in the disability rights movement. I realized the restlessness I’d been feeling had been fueled by doubt. I was not feeling very grounded and wondered whether I should keep doing what I was doing or should I be doing something else? I believe this experience was God’s way

of confirming the work I'd been doing, while also saying that now was the time for me to tell my story.

After leaving the hospital, I called Kristen Vincent and shared a box containing letters and cards I'd received since my illness. The box also contained the February 23, 2009 issue of Time magazine titled "Mind and Body Special Issue: How Faith Can Heal;" the Spring 2009 issue of Spinal Column, a publication of the Shepherd Center, in which James Shepherd wrote, "Your faith can become the ultimate source of hope and strength;" and a copy of the February 2009 The Daily Word. I asked Kristen to help me write my book. In April of 2015, it was published.

Part spiritual memoir, *I Love Today: A Story of Transformation* is my reflection on my life as a son, husband and father; as a person with a disability; as a community organizer; and as a child of God. It examines

the fears behind our social attitudes and offers insights for a more inclusive world. Along the way, it inspires us all to learn to love today.

For more information on *I Love Today: A Story of Transformation* by Mark Johnson, visit:

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/232739460/i-love-today-a-story-of-transformation>

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CALENDAR

April

April 21 – 22

GCDD Quarterly Meeting, Atlanta, GA

www.gcdd.org

April 22

TASH Regional Conference: Faith & Flourishing,
Nashville, TN
<http://bit.ly/1SNXbge>

April 25 – 26

13th Annual Service Providers Assn. for
Developmental Disabilities (SPADD) Conference,
Augusta, GA

<http://bit.ly/1MQOS42>

April 29 – May 1

Abilities Expo New York Metro
Edison, NJ

<http://www.abilities.com/newyork/>

May

May 1 – 3

2016 American Network of Community Options &
Resources Conference

Chicago, IL

<http://bit.ly/22aqrAm>

May 6

7th Annual CUNY Accessibility Conference, New York,
NY

<http://bit.ly/239aakV>

May 17 – 18

2016 Annual Disability Resource Network for Post-
Secondary Education Conference, Vancouver, BC,
Canada

<http://bit.ly/1RCNSAF>

May 21

Ability in Tech Summit, Berkeley, CA

<http://bit.ly/1MbIbcO>

May 23 – 26

Summer Institute on Theology & Disability, Holland, MI

<http://bit.ly/1WapZ5C>

June

June 6 – 9

American Association on Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) Annual Meeting,
Atlanta, GA

<http://bit.ly/22aiMSz>

June 8 – 10

National Assoc. of State Directors
of Developmental Disabilities Services
Forum & Mid-Year Conference
Kansas City, MO

<http://bit.ly/1TAcFGU>

June 8 – 11

Society for Disability Studies Annual Conference,
Phoenix, AZ

<http://bit.ly/1RMdjMJ>

June 9

Webinar: Developing Inclusive Residential Services

<http://bit.ly/25wv0t6>

June 13 – 16

National Disability Rights Network

2016 Annual Conference Baltimore, MD

<http://bit.ly/23eyHl5>

June 19 – 21

2016 National ADA Symposium

Denver, CO

<http://bit.ly/1Waqf4A>

June 21 – 23

2016 Association of People Supporting Employment First

National Conference

Cincinnati, OH

<http://bit.ly/1Xfo65X>

June 24 – 26

Abilities Expo Chicago, Chicago, IL

<http://bit.ly/1IgZe4L>

July

July 1 – 9

55th American Council of the Blind Conference and
Convention

Minneapolis, MN

<http://bit.ly/1MQPpTI>

July 6 – 8

2016 National Association of Councils on Developmental
Disabilities Conference and Annual Meeting

Washington, DC

<http://bit.ly/1qoR4Gr>

July 9 – 14

Toronto Summer Institute

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

<http://bit.ly/1UTZoe0>

July 11 – 16

Association on Higher Education & Disability 2016

Annual Conference

Indianapolis, IN

<http://bit.ly/25JvqN0>

July 14 – 15

GCDD Quarterly Meeting, Atlanta, GA

www.gcdd.org

Planning an upcoming event?

Send your information to GCDD Public Information Associate and Social Media Coordinator Jhai James jhai.james@gcdd.ga.gov; Subject line: “Community Calendar” by Feb. 15 to be included in the calendar. Visit GCDD’s expanded online community calendar to view additional local events at www.gcdd.org/calendar.

Calendar Highlight:

The Disability VOTE – Feel the Power!

Disability Day at the Capitol

February 18, 2016

See pages 16-17 for additional details and registration form.

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RESOURCES

For additional information about the articles and issues in this edition of *Making a Difference* magazine, consult the

following resources.

**Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
(GCDD)**

www.gcdd.org

404.657.2126 or

888.275.4233 (ASK.GCDD)

State Government

**Georgia Senate &
House of Representatives**

www.legis.state.ga.us

Georgia Governor's Office

www.gov.state.ga.us

404.656.1776

Department of Community Affairs

www.dca.ga.gov

Georgia Housing Search

www.georghousingsearch.org

877.428.8844

Department of Labor

www.dol.state.ga.us

General Information

www.georgia.gov

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office

www.ltgov.georgia.gov

404.656.5030

In The News

Tommy Hilfiger Debuts Adaptive Clothing Line

<http://usa.tommy.com/shop/en/thb2cus/search/kids-runway-of-dreams-adaptive-clothing?icid=hp:desktop:story1:RODSHOPNOW:022316>

Emergency Rooms Go Sensory-Friendly

<https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2016/02/23/emergency-rooms-sensory/21946/>

Siblings with Disabilities Play Music through Assistive Technologies

<http://www.fox5atlanta.com/health/fox-medical-team/111094142-story>

Around GCDD

GCDD's Real Communities Initiative Receives National Award

www.aaid.org

Update on GCDD's Five Year Plan

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities www.gcdd.org

2016 Disability Day at the Capitol

Governor Deal Speaks at 18th Annual Disability Day at the Capitol

www.gov.georgia.gov

Advocates Rally to Get Out The Vote at Last Disability Day

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities www.gcdd.org

<http://gcdd.org/news-a-media/videos/93-youtube-com.html>

The Disability Guide to Voting in the 2016 Election

Georgia Secretary of State: My Voter Page

<https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov/MVP/mvp.do>

County Voter Registration

<http://sos.georgia.gov/cgi-bin/countyregistrarsindex.asp>

County Board of

Registrars <http://elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/countyregistrars.do>

Georgia Department of Driver Services

<http://www.dds.ga.gov/drivers/dldata.aspx?con=1749371755&ty=dl>

Voters with Disabilities

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/voters_with_disabilities

2016 Elections and Voter Registration Calendar

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/2016_election_dates

Register to Vote

<https://registertovote.sos.ga.gov/GAOLVR/welcome.do#no-back-button>

Georgia Voter ID Requirements:

http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/georgia_voter_identification_requirements2

A Look Back at the 2016 Legislative Session

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities www.gcdd.org

The Next Five Years: How DD Councils Will Focus on Communities At Large

Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD)

[www.acl.gov/Programs/AIDD/ Index.aspx](http://www.acl.gov/Programs/AIDD/Index.aspx)

What is Cultural Competency?

The National Center for Cultural Competence,
Georgetown University: nccc.georgetown.edu/

Straight Talk

I Love Today: A Story of Transformation by Mark
Johnson with Kristen Vincent

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/232739460/i-love-today-a-story-of-transformation>

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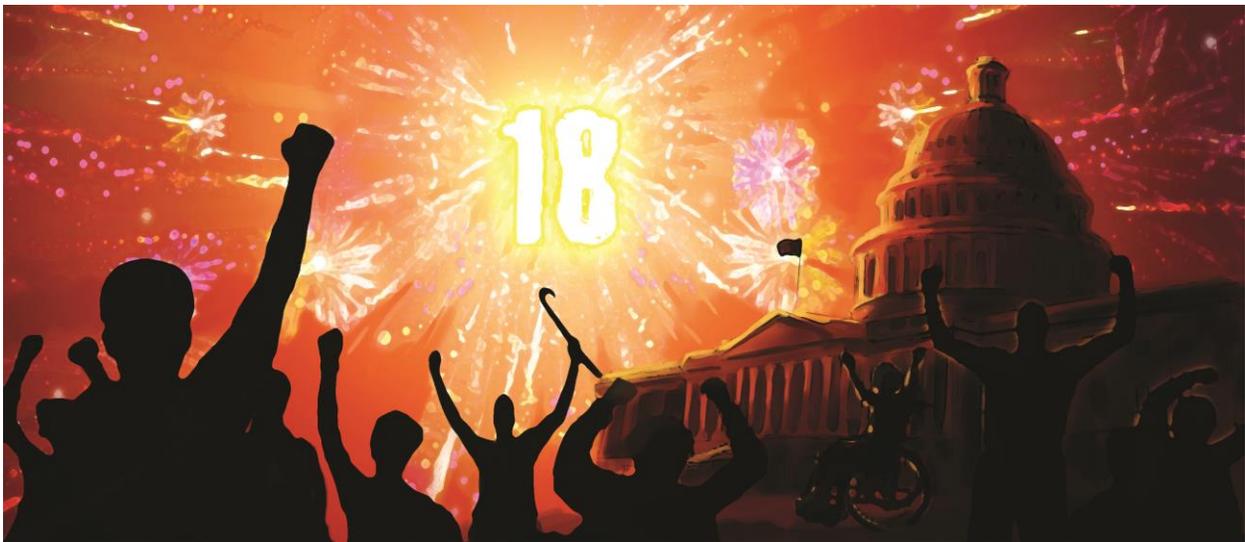
We want to hear from you!

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

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Cartoon

Description: people with and without disabilities are in front of a State Capitol with fireworks that illuminate an 18 to commemorate Disability Day at the Capitol



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