

# Making **a** Difference

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 1

SUMMER 2022



## Back To School

***The State of  
Inclusive Education***

**COVID-19  
Updates**

**Real World Work Experiences  
Enable Inclusive College Students**

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Attorney and advocate Leslie Lipson shares an overview of the education and advocacy environment and provides tips for parents as students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) prepare to go back to school.

## COVID-19 UPDATE

### 18 GCDD's COVID-19 Updates

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COVID-19: What has COVID cost Georgia and how do we bounce back better? GCDD is working meticulously to help Georgians to continue to practice hand hygiene, get vaccinated and tested, and wear masks. By the time this summer issue of Making a Difference Magazine is published, Appendix K and the public health emergency will expire. Will there be an extension?

## IPSE & EMPLOYMENT

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## UPDATES

Dear Readers,

GCDD anticipates announcing its new executive director soon. While we are in transition of new leadership, the staff is working hard, diligently, and succeeding in making sure GCDD's mission is fulfilled by continuing to advance the lives of persons with developmental disabilities and to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play, and worship in their communities.

This back-to-school summer edition of Making a Difference Magazine will focus on an article about Individualized Education Plans (IEP) that will include tips for parents navigating school systems and the factors that contribute to the current state of special education. Articles in this issue of Making a Difference Magazine will also focus on IPSE and employment for people with developmental disabilities. We are excited about the updates regarding The GCDD Storytelling Project. This issue's Include College article will highlight the University of Georgia.

GCDD is working meticulously to encourage Georgians to continue to practice good hand hygiene,

get vaccinated and tested, and wear face masks. By the time this summer issue of Making a Difference Magazine is published, Appendix K and the public health emergency expire. Will there be an extension?

Another great article in this issue is about a Columbus State alumnus who opened a boutique in Columbus, Georgia. She is providing opportunities for IPSE students in the GOALS program. The purpose of this program is to recruit students as employees and to go into the community to promote hiring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This unique program through the boutique helps students gain real-world work experience.

Uniting for Change self-advocate John McCarty talks about growing up with a developmental disability (being nonverbal) as well as his wonderful experiences as a former IPSE college student and the great support he received from his professors. Our expert update will feature Parent Mentor Cheryl Grant. GCDD and Friends of L'Arche Atlanta have a great partnership managing The GCDD Storytelling Project and continue to work together to share stories



Nick Perry

GCDD Council Chairman

## GCDD VIEWPOINT



Nick Perry

of Georgia's IDD community. This year through the project, GCDD along with L'Arche Atlanta will be providing advocacy storytelling training and are looking for participants for its Storytelling collection. The GCDD Impact section features an introduction to the GCDD 2021 impact map that depicts the geographic impact of our work in 2021. Look for upcoming events for the next quarter in our calendar of events.

While GCDD has made great steps in advocating for the IDD community, there is still much work that needs to be done. You too can do your part. Remember to contact your state legislators to connect with them to see how they can support disability rights. Your voice matters, and you can make a difference by speaking out.

# The Value of Being Valued in Inclusive Post Secondary Education

By John McCarty, Self-Advocate in the Leadership Collective of Uniting for Change



Many people believe that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can't learn and don't belong in post secondary educational settings. As part of Uniting for Change and a former post secondary student, I can unequivocally say they are wrong.

A person with a disability who has the desire can and should pursue a post secondary education, including people with IDD. Being in a college classroom with appropriate support opens windows of possibilities for everyone, including non-disabled peers, professors, and staff. We all learn from each other, not just what is being formally taught as part of the curriculum. In this way, people with IDD add to the robust educational

experience that is possible in post secondary settings.

For me, John McCarty, furthering my education was basically three things: two classes on the Perimeter College campus of Georgia State University (GSU) and General Educational Development (GED) prep classes.

The idea of a diploma was something I had on my mind from a very early age. In Michigan, where I was fully

included in 4th and 5th grades, I heard my mom talking about "diploma track kids." I really wanted to be one of those kids. The "diploma track kids" seemed to have a brighter future with a lot more options. They would be able to maybe go to college or get a real job. That would put them on the path to independent lives and full community inclusion.

When I was going to start 6th grade, we moved to Georgia, and



we found the schools completely segregated. The students with disabilities were separate from the students without disabilities. It seemed to me at this point that I would never get a diploma. All of this was before I could effectively communicate through spelling, which I learned when I was about 20 years old.

***When I learned to use the letterboard my world opened up. I relished the lessons on a variety of topics, from macroeconomics to Civil War and WWII history, to math and geology, to complex current events involving politics.***

A chance came up for taking a class on the Perimeter College campus of Georgia State University. The class was a remote Duke University House Course called Beyond Christian Intentions: Colonialism, Evangelism & Reconciliation in Native American Communities. This was a six-week course that ended with a group project. From there, I took another class— Physics. A retired



physicist taught a University of Virginia course called How Things Work. A small voice kept niggling the back part of my brain. I still hoped to be a diploma kid, and now I saw a way.

A family friend and advocate arranged for me and some other young guys, ranging in age from 17 to 22, to meet with the disability coordinator and the dean of adult education at Gwinnett Technical College where GED prep classes are conducted.

The dean had us take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) at the highest level, hired a teacher who was open to working with a bunch of guys who spell to communicate, and she scheduled a six-week

class. The class was intense; but we really felt intellectually prepared.

We registered to take the GED, requesting accommodations. Pearson flat out denied the request for a communication partner. The person in charge of all accommodations for testing said she would never allow a communication partner.

I never got my GED. But that time I spent on a college campus remains a bright spot.

My confidence went through the roof, and my overall life joy went with it. People with IDD deserve the same opportunities as their peers.

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# The State of Inclusive Education in Georgia: A Conversation with Leslie Lipson

Featuring Leslie Lipson

As students head back to school, education is top of mind for parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While special education provides opportunities for students to excel, there are often many obstacles that families and students face when working to get the educational support that they are entitled to and eligible for under the law.

## *The State of Education for Students with Developmental Disabilities*

Leslie Lipson, J.D., is an expert in the field of strategic planning for advocacy and education issues impacting people with developmental disabilities. She is an attorney who has dedicated her career to working on behalf of people with disabilities. Founder of Lipson Advocacy, Lipson offers advocacy solutions using general educational and special education law from a values-based foundation and mindset of presuming competency. Lipson Advocacy supports both attorneys and non-attorney advocates to succeed in school-based advocacy and teaches family members, professionals, and allies to stand beside students with disabilities in the advocacy world.

In 2020, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) funded a grant for Lipson Advocacy to convene and lead stakeholders through the Georgia Coalition for Equity in Education (GCEE) who push for practices that ensure education equity in Georgia and work toward inclusive, quality educational opportunities for all students.

Lipson highlighted that many of the issues that lead to discrimination against people with developmental disabilities start in schools. School systems and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are affected by several factors like ableism, unconscious bias, classism, racism, and etiquette culture. Leslie highlighted issues that are currently affecting the many families and students with developmental disabilities in Georgia with whom she works. Here are some of the most important terms to understand when thinking about discrimination impacting students with developmental disabilities.

**Unconscious Bias:** negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold. Studies have shown that unconscious biases affect

individuals' attitudes and actions, creating real-world implications, even though they may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Unconscious biases allow ableism, classism, racism, and etiquette culture to thrive in education. The structure of school systems and education for students with developmental disabilities are difficult to navigate because of the way they operate, and the operation is often created through unconscious biases.

**Ableism:** prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental and/or emotional ability that contribute to a system of oppression for people with disabilities. IEPs can be used to segregate students with developmental disabilities from the rest of the school. Segregated classrooms are often in separate wings, trailers, or even basements, and may have different schedules for lunch and recess than the rest of the school. Students in segregated classrooms may not be included in school assemblies or other school-wide activities. This practice instills a feeling of "away and apart" for students in segregated classrooms and their families that can last into adulthood.

Racism: individual, cultural, institutional, and systemic discrimination based on race. Racism is often grounded in a presumed superiority of the white race over minority groups that are historically or currently defined as non-white.

Etiquette culture: unwritten, established rules or customs that a person must follow to navigate a system. Having a culture of etiquette, or “good manners,” can lead to discrimination for those who do not know or who are not able to follow these manners or expectations. If a school or teacher expects parents with children with IEPs to bring homemade brownies to meetings, send handwritten thank you cards, and have multiple caregivers participate at in-person meetings, this is “etiquette culture.” A parent or person who is not able to meet these expectations due to financial or other challenges may face discrimination. It’s important for schools, teachers, and parents to remember that there are laws in place to provide education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. “Laws aren’t predicated on niceness. You shouldn’t have to be kind or show

up with goodies to get your student what they require to access their education,” said Lipson.

Classism: prejudicial thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in socio-economic status and income, usually referred to as class. Paired with racism and etiquette culture, classism plays a large role in who can get the best education where.

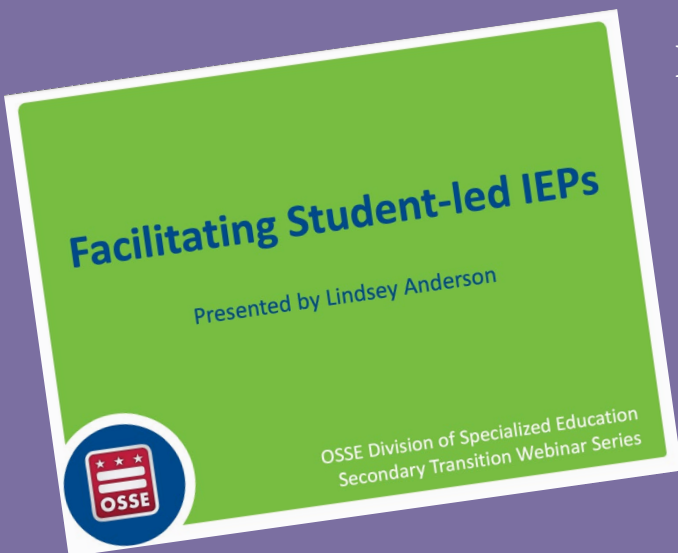
### *Impact over Intent*

Good intentions do not always lead to positive impact. While a school may intend to provide superior education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the actions they take to do so may have a negative impact on students and families. Lipson consistently reminds the families with whom she advocates to remind schools to “presume competence.” This means keeping expectations high for students with developmental disabilities and not pre-judging an individual’s abilities. The impact of keeping students in segregated classrooms as opposed to inclusive classrooms with supports is the development of a lasting feeling

of being kept “away and apart” for students and families. A separate Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA) may intend to act as a way to focus on issues pertaining to students with IEPs, but the impact of a separate SEPTA is that the general Parent Teacher Association (PTA) does not take into consideration the unique needs of students with IEPs when making decisions or planning school events. An alternative to divided PTAs is to merge the organizations and include a focus on students with IEPs on every PTA committee so that students with disabilities are always considered.

### *Challenges and Opportunities from the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Lipson explained that the issues of unconscious bias, racism, classism, and ableism have been exacerbated and exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While this exposure is found in many institutions, school systems were clearly affected; this exposure provides an opportunity to address these issues. The pandemic’s disruption of education also changed the landscape of parent engagement



## For Information on Student-Led IEPs

Download:

[“Facilitating Student-led IEPs”](#)

Presented by Lindsey Anderson from OSSE Division of Specialized Education Secondary Transition Webinar Series



and understanding of their child's abilities. When education responsibilities shifted from schools to parents during school closures and virtual education, there was a shift from schools being the primary source of understanding for students' needs to parents better understanding their children's needs because of the extended amount of time that they spent engaged in their child's education. Now parents can better ask for what they know their child needs. Schools received funding support multiple times throughout the pandemic, and many are spending these funds on things they don't need. Parents: now is the time to ask for investment in education supports for your child.

It is important to understand all the factors that contribute to the current state of education for students with developmental disabilities and the work it takes to make positive changes. While it's tempting to argue to take apart and rebuild this educational system for the benefit of students throughout the state, parents understand that they must navigate this system, however broken it is.

### *What is an IEP Meeting?*

The Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction, accommodations, and related services.

A 504 plan is a detailed plan for how the school is going to prevent discrimination against your child because of their disabilities. It is a list of accommodations that they will provide to level the playing field

between your child and non-disabled students.

The difference between an IEP and a 504 plan is that an IEP provides for specialized instruction for students with specific disabilities described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in grades K-12. A 504 plan provides accommodations to a broader range of disabilities and can serve students at both the K-12 and college levels.

### *Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting*

Lipson's identified many things you can do as a parent before your child's IEP meeting. Here are a few ideas to help make the meeting successful.

Prepare by writing a list of goals for your child and plan on taking notes during the meeting to help remember all of the things you discussed. Write down your child's strengths and weaknesses and be sure the IEP is tailored to your child's strengths. Consider the past school year's best approaches and how they can be implemented or evolved to best support your child. Many advocacy professionals recommend using a [dedicated IEP binder](#) to keep this content organized.

Advocates encourage students to [attend their own IEPs in the interest of self-determination](#). IDEA requires that a student age 14 or older must be invited to attend their IEP meeting, but attendance is not required. Although each student is different, experts say that younger children (as early as 4th grade) can benefit from and contribute value to their IEP meeting. If your student is joining, prepare them for what they can expect during the meeting. If your student is not old enough to

participate in the IEP meeting, you may want to bring along a video or written statement so that their voice and opinions are included in their educational plan.

Be sure to request a copy of evaluation results and new assessments to review and contact the school psychologist with questions prior to the meeting. This allows you time to review and consider information before the meeting, saving time during the meeting. Information from private professionals like tutors or therapist who work with your child can also be beneficial for IEP meetings.

Having more than one adult who is part of your child's life present in the meeting (this could be another parent, a grandparent, or other advocate) is helpful to provide support and record and take notes.

If you need an interpreter or other accommodation to fully participate in the meeting, request it in writing ahead of the meeting so that the IEP team can provide the appropriate accommodation.

### *After the IEP Meeting*

Congratulations! IEP meetings can be stressful, so take a moment to relax.

You should review your meeting notes and the IEP for any missing information. Follow up in writing with the school to request information that should be included.

During the school year, coordinate with teachers and aides to track progress and proactively troubleshoot any issues. Don't be afraid to advocate for additional meetings to discuss your student's progress with their teachers.

## Considerations for Parents

As a parent, it can be overwhelming when you know your student needs a support but you don't know what resources are available to you. If you aren't sure what resources or options are available to you, there are a few things you can do. If you feel that your student has learning needs that aren't being met, but you aren't sure what resources are appropriate or available, you can request an independent evaluation for [assistive technology](#), [adaptive technology](#), or reading instruction.

1) **Assistive technology** is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.

You can also request adaptive technology evaluation.

2) **Adaptive technology** includes any physical items that may be needed to assist your student navigate or exist within the classroom environment. Adaptive technology can be low-tech. Examples can be a special chair, a no-slip seat pad, or other similar items.

3) **Reading instruction evaluations** are also a good tool to see what needs your student may have. Additionally, plan time to submit questions in writing to your schools, teachers, and/or administrators. Sometimes educators need space and time to get answers and find the resources you need.

Check out trusted resources such as:

Parent to Parent of Georgia  
[www.p2pga.org/roadmap/education/understanding-ieps](http://www.p2pga.org/roadmap/education/understanding-ieps)

Lipson Advocacy  
[www.lipsonadvocacy.com](http://www.lipsonadvocacy.com)

Center for Parent Information & Resources  
[www.parentcenterhub.org/meetings/#review](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/meetings/#review)

...

People with developmental disabilities  
& their family members  
who get a COVID-19 vaccine can receive a gift card by sending in a picture!  
ages 6+ months to 5 years now eligible



### Eligibility:

- Have a developmental disability or have a family member with a developmental disability
- Be a resident of Georgia
- Receive the shot between June 9, 2022-September 30, 2022
- Gift cards may be received for first dose, second dose, third dose, or booster shots

### Submission:

- Complete this form using the URL below or QR code
- include a picture celebrating after receiving the vaccine
- Include a picture displaying your vaccine card (photos of vaccine cards are for verification only and will not be shared)

[bit.ly/vaccinegiftcard](https://bit.ly/vaccinegiftcard)

# The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities Welcomes Two New Council Members This Summer: National Black Deaf Advocate Sharia Stripling and Five-Time Olympic Medalist Elana Taylor

By Tianna Faulkner

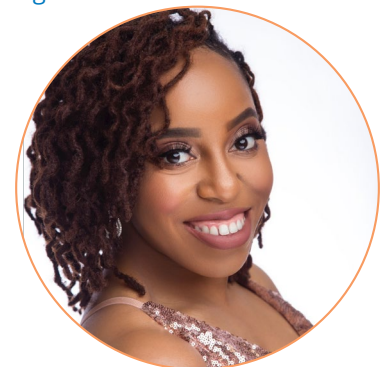
## ***Sharia Denise Stripling***

was born and raised in Fort Valley, Georgia. At age four, she suddenly and unexpectedly lost hearing with no cause of illness. As she grew older, she developed a passion for dance and pageantry after reading a book in middle school by Heather Whitestone, the first deaf ballerina and Miss America 1995. Stripling trained in dance and cheered in high school. In 2007, she competed in her first pageant, the Miss Deaf Georgia pageant. Although she did not win the competition, she enjoyed the experience and got to know the other contestants. After graduating from high school in 2008, Stripling continued her education at Valdosta State University and became the first deaf graduate with a Bachelor of

Fine Arts in Dance and Theater in 2014. During her matriculation at Valdosta State University, Stripling became the first deaf woman to win the title of Alpha Phi Alpha: Mu Omicron Miss Black and Gold 2013 and held the title Miss Deaf Georgia 2013-2015.

Since graduating from college, Stripling has worked as a dance instructor, continues to serve her community, perform, and compete in competitions such as the Ms. Black Georgia International Ambassador competition. In June 2021, she met Terryann Nash and was asked to be a part of Nash Inspired. Opportunities like this inspired Stripling to implement her platform "Breaking Barriers" to help deaf youth. She is

currently working at Apexx, an after-school program, as a dance instructor and American Sign Language coach. Stripling is engaged to the love of her life, Jorel Steven James. She is a National Black Deaf Advocate and looking forward to working with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities to use her experience to help make an impact in Georgia.



## ***Elana Meyers Taylor***

is a four-time World Champion, eight-time World Championship medalist, four-time Winter Olympian, and five-time Olympic medalist (2010, 2014, 2018, 2022), and 2015 and 2022 World Cup Champion in bobsled. She is the most decorated African American Winter Olympian and women's bobsledder in history.

Taylor attended George Washington University on a softball scholarship and went on to play professionally for the Mid-Michigan Ice. In the summer of 2007, she made the trip to Lake Placid, N.Y.,

home of the U.S. National Bobsled Team, and she never left. In April 2014, she became Elana Meyers Taylor, marrying fellow bobsled athlete Nic Taylor, and in 2020, Elana and Nic welcomed their beautiful baby boy, Nico, into the world!

Elana served a six-year term as an athlete director on the USA Bobsled and Skeleton Board of Directors and is currently a mentor for Classroom Champions. Recently, George Washington University honored her with an honorary doctorate degree. Elana has served as the president of the Women's Sports Foundation, a member

of the Athlete Advisory Panel, and has traveled the country sharing her passion for sports and equality for girls. She has recently focused her efforts on disability inclusion as her son Nico was born with Down Syndrome and a hearing impairment.



## Back-to-School Tips from a Parent Mentor

Featuring Cheryl Grant

By Hilary Vece



**Cheryl Grant** has been working with parents of students with developmental disabilities since 2008 when she became a Parent Mentor in Decatur City Schools. Primarily connecting parents with resources in the school and the community, Cheryl also provides parent training on topics about disabilities. The Parent Mentor position was created through Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership, a program supported by the Georgia Department of Education Division for Special Education Services and Support and tasked with the creation of Parent Mentor positions, whose mission is “to build effective family, school, and community partnerships that lead to greater achievement for students, especially those with disabilities.”

Becoming involved as a Parent Mentor was natural as Cheryl

was a parent of a child with a developmental disability—a key requirement to become a Parent Mentor. “The main thing you need to have in this position is a child with a disability of any age, living or deceased,” said Cheryl, “and that’s very strategic. As a parent, they are able to speak from a place of knowledge, empathy, and power.”

As a Parent Mentor, Cheryl has a wealth of knowledge and expertise that she shares with other parents. Here are a few tips to consider in the upcoming year.

### ***What an IEP is and is not.***

Completing the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process is an important piece to ensuring your child receives the best education available. “A student’s IEP is a springboard to help the school and the parents guide the child to more autonomy and to work on skills,”

says Cheryl. Recognizing the value of IEPs, but also the reality that parents must manage their expectations, Cheryl often reflects on a quote from friend and fellow expert in the field Jackie McNair: “People need to understand that the IEP is not going to heal their child.”

### ***Organize and save documentation.***

Throughout your child’s school career, you will complete a lot of paperwork. Cheryl suggests investing in cloud-based storage (like DropBox) to scan and save documents. This includes your child’s IEPs, student work samples that track progress, and initial eligibility/diagnosis that marks the school’s acknowledgment of the disability. “The initial eligibility is key to accessing support services should [your child] need them when they are older,” said Cheryl.

### ***Communication is key.***

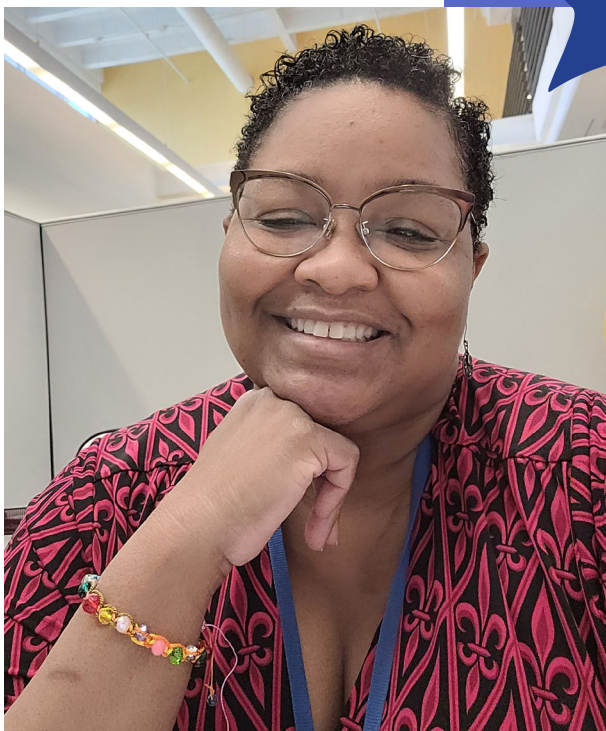
Keep communication open with the school district. “This sounds cliché, but it’s highly important,” said Cheryl. This is often easier to do when students are younger, but it’s important to maintain an open line of communication throughout your child’s school career.

### ***Trusts aren’t just for the rich.***

“Get your business in order, get your will together, and seek out special needs trusts,” says Cheryl. “I suggest doing these one at a time because it can seem like a lot.” Ensuring the best education possible is critical, but so are considerations for life after graduation. Like many parents of children with developmental disabilities, Cheryl has concerns about homelessness and institutionalization for her child, reflecting, “if I haven’t handled things on my end, it ruins his chances of having access to different supports in the community.”

### ***Life after graduation.***

Considering your child’s life after they’ve graduated is incredibly important. Georgia has eight universities that offer inclusive college, also called inclusive post secondary education (IPSE). There are also many certificate programs for people to learn trades through organizations like Goodwill Industries. Allowing your child to explore their interests and find a rewarding career reinforces their agency.



## ***Did You Know?***

Parent Mentors are present in over 90 school districts in Georgia. You can find your school district’s Parent Mentor at [www.ParentMentors.org](http://www.ParentMentors.org).



# Telling Our Stories: How The GCDD Storytelling Project is Lifting Voices in the Developmental Disability Community

By Hilary Vece

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Storytelling Project lifts and shares the stories of people with developmental disabilities throughout the state of Georgia. Using several mediums, The GCDD Storytelling project has produced a collection of written and photographed stories, a podcast, a documentary film, and a drive-in roadshow of filmed performances. The GCDD Storytelling Project is produced by L'Arche Atlanta through a grant from GCDD.

Beginning in 2018, The GCDD Storytelling Project has connected with people with developmental disabilities and their families by simply asking them to tell their story. Traveling the state, photographers and writers collected [more than 150 stories](#) of real life, bravery, challenges, and courage. Selecting

stories by district, a book was printed and shared with legislators, allowing advocates to easily show legislators a story from their constituents.

Whether it be speaking with a legislator or a community leader, stories are an effective advocacy tool. "Disability advocacy done in the abstract like 'this number of people' or 'this number of dollars' can only go so far," said Tim Moore, Executive Director of L'Arche Atlanta. Moore expanded, explaining that building indirect relationships through storytelling can be influencing.

Throughout the project, L'Arche Atlanta has partnered with organizations and people throughout the state and across the country. This year, L'Arche Atlanta has continued a partnership with StoryMuse to shape the next phase of The GCDD Storytelling Project. Shannon Turner, Founder and

Creative Director of StoryMuse, is a storytelling expert that has been involved in most of The GCDD Storytelling Project's efforts since its creation.

"One of my favorite quotes about this work," said Turner, "is 'The shortest distance between two human hearts is a story.'"

Following the success of the first phase, The GCDD Storytelling Project began its production of their podcast, Hidden Voices.

"These are funny, heartwarming, challenging stories about people with developmental disabilities who are living, working, and advocating for their rights." [-The GCDD Storytelling Project](#)

The first season of Hidden Voices explores issues affecting people with developmental disabilities with a different topic for each episode. Wide ranging, topics include adaptive technology, employment, education, and advocacy. Describing the second season of Hidden Voices, Turner said "it is a deeper dive through the lens of someone looking to be an advocate."

Stories are just data with a soul.

— Brené Brown.



# Telling Our Stories...

## Real Lives of People with Developmental Disabilities in Georgia

L'Arche Atlanta understood the value of the stories already collected and sought new ways to share these intimate glimpses into the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families. While being featured in a TODAY Original for TODAY.com, L'Arche Atlanta was introduced to two filmmakers, Zach and Lexi Read, in Florida. Moore brought the Reads, L'Arche filmmaker, Michael McDonald, and the Storytelling Project Coordinator, Irene Turner, together, and the "6,000 Waiting" documentary was born. This award-winning documentary featured three Georgians on the Medicaid COMP/NOW Waiver waitlist. Named "6,000 Waiting," the film flagged that there were 6,000 people with developmental disabilities in Georgia in the need of services available through Medicaid Waivers. This is a staggeringly high number of individuals compared to the rest of the country. Unfortunately, this number has surpassed 7,000 since the film's production.

"Three Georgia residents with disabilities fight to access NOW/COMP Waiver funding that would allow them to live life on their own terms. A life guaranteed by their Olmstead rights. What happens when people with disabilities want to live outside of nursing facilities and in the community?" [-6,000 Waiting](#)

Disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic required The GCDD Storytelling Project to find a creative way to connect with people safely without spreading the coronavirus. The GCDD Storytelling Project began to accept 30-second clips virtually to create "Over the Wire."



People were asked to choose a question from a list and film themselves answering the question. Clips from "Over the Wire" were shared on social media by GCDD and L'Arche Atlanta.

As the pandemic continued, The GCDD Storytelling Project developed Treasure Maps, a short film featuring stories and performances from Georgians with developmental disabilities. Participants were asked to share their story however they wanted, resulting in a range of presentations from Elvis impressions to cooking shows. This film was shared virtually and at pop-up drive-in theaters in six communities throughout Georgia.

"Treasure Maps is a collection of short films showcasing 10 Georgia storytellers as they provide an up-close and personal viewpoint into what it's like navigating the complex webs of life in our communities as a person with a developmental disability." [-The GCDD Storytelling Project](#)

Looking forward toward the next phase of The GCDD Storytelling Project, plans include producing

16 new written and photographed stories and another Treasure Maps film. This Treasure Maps film will focus on Central Georgia, specifically the Macon-area, pulling in stories from the local community. The Treasure Maps film was kicked off with a five-week class about how to tell stories. At the end of the workshop, stories will be selected and highlighted at a community celebration.

This strategic focus supports GCDD's goal of reaching new voices from marginalized populations. "GCDD has an explicit strategy to get outside of Atlanta," said Moore. Targeted populations include African Americans, Latinx, LGBTQ, and rural areas.

If you're interested in joining The GCDD Storytelling Project, contact Shannon Turner at [ddstorytellingga@gmail.com](mailto:ddstorytellingga@gmail.com) or by phone at (678) 837-6681.

You can access these amazing stories from The GCDD Storytelling Project at [story-collection.gcdd.org](http://story-collection.gcdd.org)

# GCDD Project Impact Map 2021

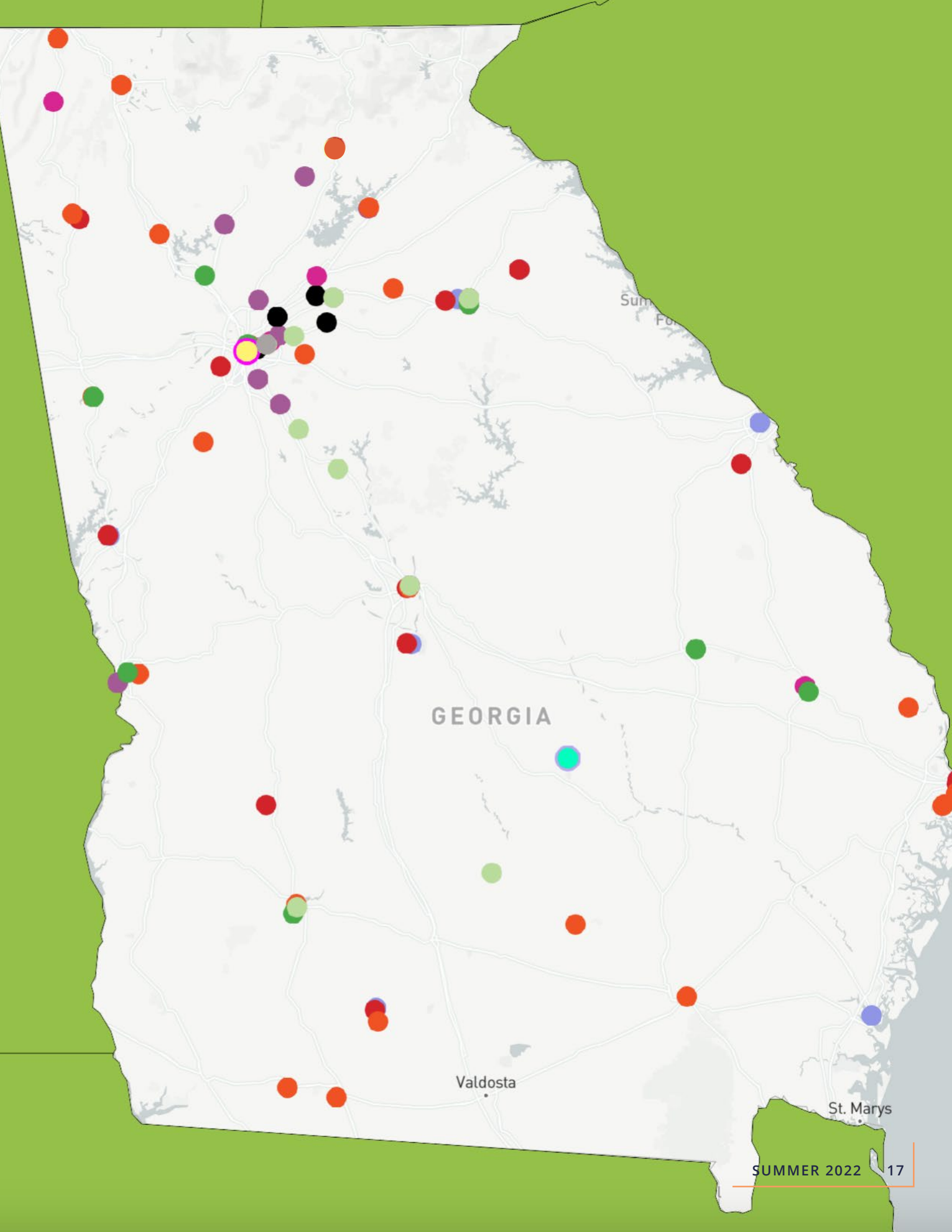
GCDD's mission is to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for diverse people/persons with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play, and worship in their communities. Learn how GCDD impacted communities across Georgia in 2021 through this interactive impact map.

Scroll through this list on the [interactive map](#) to view the locations of the initiatives, programs, projects, and people who GCDD supported through targeted and strategic collaboration.



- Advocacy Days
- Center for Public Representation
- Children's Freedom Initiative (CFI)
- Council Member Hometowns
- Coalition of Family Advocates
- COVID-19 Response
- Georgia Coalition on Equity in Education
- Georgians for a Healthy Future Training
- Inclusive Colleges & Universities
- Morehouse School of Medicine - Telehealth Project
- Project SEARCH Sites
- Real Communities Sites
- School-to-Prison Pipeline Advocacy Training Locations
- Storytelling Events and Participant Hometowns
- SUN Self-Advocacy Trainings & Resources
- Supported Decision Making Initiative
- TA Center & Provider Organization Sites
- Welcoming Community Movement





GEORGIA

Valdosta

St. Marys





# COVID-19 UPDATES

By Naomi D. Williams

School is out. Summer is here. People are enjoying time at the pool or finding places to stay cool. Day programs are open, vacations are being taken, and summer camps are in full effect. People are ready for COVID-19 to be over, but we must remind ourselves that COVID-19 is not over. People are still getting COVID-19. People are still being hospitalized due to COVID-19, and people are still dying from COVID-19 or complications of it. We also know many are now living with “long COVID-19”. This is something that we will be living with for some time to come.

While we move forward with creating our new normal, we need to be aware that the status of being in a public health emergency will end, eventually. And then what?

## Understanding a Public Health Emergency

The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) can declare a public health emergency (PHE) if a disease presents a public health emergency, there is a significant infectious disease outbreak, or bioterrorist attack. Special programs or policies may be created or allowed during a public health emergency.

A public health emergency goes into effect for 90 days, and it must be reassessed and extended in 90-day intervals. When a public health emergency is set to end (expire), there will be notice given 60 days before the end date. Once there is a date for the public health emergency to end, there is an additional grace period that could keep the programs running for a final six months.

The current public health emergency is set to expire on July 15, 2022. Because notice hasn't gone out about it ending, we anticipate the public health emergency being renewed for another 90 days. We have been waiting on Congress to approve and extend the budget to learn if the public health emergency will be officially renewed. While we wait, it is important for families to know how they are impacted by supports put in place because of the public health emergency.

We want to be mindful and remember that the programs started under a public health emergency will go away unless they are permanently kept and funded. One program that has benefited many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families is called Appendix K. Appendix K is the emergency preparedness and response guidance specific to home and community-based service waivers (such as ICWP/NOW/COMP). Each state was given a guide to follow and was allowed to insert programs, resources, and funding that would help meet the needs of their specific community. In Georgia, for Medicaid recipients, Appendix K has allowed for:

- ✓ Family hires
- ✓ Telehealth medical appointments
- ✓ Telehealth therapy appointments
- ✓ Increased pay rates
- ✓ Retainer payments (payment to hold a spot or staff resuming in-person services)

If you or your family has benefited from any portion of Appendix K, begin to think about what you or your family needs to know and how to prepare if part or all of it goes away when the public health emergency ends. Questions to begin asking yourself include

- ? How will I or my family be impacted if I no longer have needed services provided under Appendix K?
- ? Are there other resources or supports available that meet the same or similar needs from Appendix K?
- ? Who can help me know what are the next steps?
- ? Where do I get reliable information?
- ? What do I or my family need to have in place to maintain a positive quality of life?

These questions give you and your family time to think of and create a new plan. It's better to be proactive and see what it will take to have things in place if these programs go away. In fact, the Department of Human Services encourages Georgia Medicaid recipients to act now by

- Accessing your Gateway account and
- Making sure your information is up-to-date (phone number, address, income, and number of people in the household).

## Important Update

On June 18, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) vaccine advisors voted unanimously to recommend use of both Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines in children as young as 6 months old.



There are fewer vaccination sites open today than there were six months ago. It's best to contact your child's pediatrician or your local health department to find a vaccination.

- COVID-19 vaccines are now approved for 17+ million children under 5 in the U.S.
- Georgia has started vaccinations for children under 5 at vaccine sites across the state
- Boosters are available and recommended for eligible children ages 5+

## Let's Continue

Let's continue to help keep others safe. We know there are people who may be unable to get vaccinated.

Let's continue to

- Wash our hands with soap and water
- Use hand sanitizer
- Wear a mask when indoors or around people outside of your household
- Physical distance or create space between you and others when you go to the store or public venues

•••

## Resources

*Here are resources and websites that can help keep you informed and get trusted information:*

*1) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Emergency*

[www.phe.gov/Preparedness/legal/Pages/phe-qa.aspx](http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/legal/Pages/phe-qa.aspx)

*2) Georgia Department of Community Health*

[www.dch.georgia.gov/announcement/2020-04-10/state-georgia-announces-approval-appendix-k-emergency-preparedness-response](http://www.dch.georgia.gov/announcement/2020-04-10/state-georgia-announces-approval-appendix-k-emergency-preparedness-response)

*3) Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities*

[www.gcdd.org](http://www.gcdd.org)

*4) Georgia Advocacy Office*

[www.thegao.org](http://www.thegao.org)

*5) Department of Human Services*

[www.dhs.georgia.gov/medicaid-unwinding](http://www.dhs.georgia.gov/medicaid-unwinding)



# Real World Work Experiences Enable Inclusive College Students at Columbus State University to Emerge as Workforce Leaders

By Kimberly Hudson

Students enrolled in the GOALS program at Columbus State University (CSU) are getting critical opportunities for real work experiences at the start of their inclusive college careers.

[Guidance and Opportunities for Academic and Leadership Success \(GOALS\)](#) at CSU is a two-year college certificate for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Thanks to a partnership with [The Posh Peach](#), a small business located within walking distance from the GOALS building on CSU's campus, GOALS students are getting an opportunity to have real-world work experience

at a local work site. The Posh Peach, a woman-owned small business, was created by Erin Widick, a CSU alumna, in May of 2014. A former business marketing major, Widick “threw everything [she] had into opening the boutique.” The Posh Peach offers a hand-picked collection of clothing, shoes, accessories, and gifts for everyday life and special occasions. Widick’s goal is to provide high-quality items at an affordable price for the free-spirited woman. She is also an enthusiastic advocate for people with developmental disabilities. Stephanie Marshall, former special education teacher and GOALS Program Coordinator, is “constantly looking to find

work-based practicum sites for [GOALS] students so they can see what it’s like to have several different work experiences. These experiences provide opportunities for our students to explore a variety of work options as well as pursue their interests and demonstrate their many gifts and abilities.” Many GOALS students start at CSU without any past work experience. These work-based practicum opportunities allow students to try a variety of different tasks, develop and refine skills, and inform or guide their career goals. Additionally, work experience provides mentorship opportunities, builds a professional network, helps students secure references and

letters of recommendation, and ultimately gives students an advantage in the job market. An important entrance requirement of the GOALS program is the desire to be successful in competitive employment. Most inclusive colleges, including GOALS, require students to intern at a place of their choice at the end of their program. Additionally, the GOALS program includes work-based practicum at the start of college.

“Giving the students opportunities at the beginning of the program gives them confidence, builds their resumes,



and allows them opportunities to dream in ways they hadn't thought possible,” said Marshall. “One of our students found his passion to bake,” Marshall shared, “after we took a group of our students to a cooking class to bake cookies for Valentine’s Day. That was very exciting to witness.”

College students across Georgia have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic economic downturn, and the shift to virtual work has meant a significant reduction in the number of internship opportunities available to all students. The lack of internships negatively impacts entry-level job placement for students with and without disabilities. This fueled Marshall’s search for additional work opportunities for GOALS students.

In the spring of 2022, GOALS students started pre-employment training, which include writing resumes, applying for jobs, and practicing interviewing skills. The students attended a career fair

on campus with their peers and learned about how to engage with employers. The week following the career fair, GOALS students Caleb Griffin, Thomas Harkins, and Samuel Asher had the opportunity to participate in a group interview with Widick at The Posh Peach.

Marshall said that the students appeared relaxed in the group interview and “she was blown away with how well they did. They helped each other, and it was a positive experience for them all.”

Over the course of the last two semesters, four GOALS students have had the opportunity to work at The Posh Peach and gain training and experience in an open and inviting work environment. Students worked two to three days a week completing a variety of tasks, including stocking shelves, stuffing bags, cleaning, and greeting customers.

Marshall reported that “many of our students were uncomfortable

with greeting customers at first, but they got used to it and enjoyed it.”

Following the four- to six-week work experiences, the students completed self-evaluations. These evaluations provide students with the opportunity to reflect on what they’ve learned, areas of interest, and focus areas for improvement.

I love that we can help a person or persons with disabilities grow their skills for the next step after college while helping them build their confidence.  
— Erin Widick

Using a person-centered planning process, GOALS provides students with developmental disabilities the opportunity to set and work toward their personal post secondary goals as a foundation for active, lifelong career and community participation. Students complete 36 credit hours of inclusive and program-specific courses along with work-related

internships that are designed to support the academic and personal leadership development of students.

“These work-based practicum sites are very important for our students. They are the first experience our students have in the GOALS program. We want it to be a positive and enlightening experience,” said Marshall.

GOALS aims to provide students with 3-4 work experiences plus an internship before they complete the two-year program.

Marshall continues to build a network of local businesses in Columbus who are interested in supporting work opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She aims to involve more businesses

I want to provide our students with programs that match their interests. The GOALS program doesn’t aim to just find students jobs. We aim to develop leaders in the workforce.  
—Stephanie Marshall



to provide GOALS students with additional work options.

Contact GOALS at CSU to learn how to apply to their next cohort of students. Space is limited so be sure to apply as early as possible!

Contact:

Stephanie Marshall

[goalsinfo@columbusstate.edu](mailto:goalsinfo@columbusstate.edu)

[marshall\\_stephanie1@columbusstate.edu](mailto:marshall_stephanie1@columbusstate.edu)



# Calendar of Events

## JULY

Disability Pride Month [Learn More](#)

14-15

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities Quarterly Council Meeting [Info](#)

18-20

Summer Leadership Institute  
Hosted by The ARC United States [Register](#)

19-21

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD)  
Annual Conference [Register](#)

26

2pm  
(Every Other  
Tuesday)

Tuesday Zoom Trivia  
Hosted by L'Arche Atlanta [Info](#)

## AUGUST

1

4-5pm  
(Every Monday)

COMMUNITY STRONG! Virtual Gathering  
Hosted by Uniting for Change [Register](#)

6

Black Down Syndrome Family Connection Annual Cookout  
Hosted by Down Syndrome Association of Atlanta [Info](#)

7

9:30am-  
12:30pm  
(Multiple Dates)

Sensory Friendly Sunday  
Hosted by Children's Museum of Atlanta [Info](#)

17

12-1:30pm  
7-8:30pm  
(3rd Weds/Month)

Neurodiverse Couples Partner Support Group  
Hosted by Spectrum Autism Support Group [Register](#)

## SEPTEMBER

20

12-12:45pm

LAUNCH & Learn: New Family Advocacy Training Modules  
Hosted by Georgia Coalition of Family Advocates [Register](#)

24

9am

2022 ADMH Run for Health: HERO EDITION  
Hosted by Adult Disability Medical Healthcare (ADMH) [Info](#)

## OCTOBER

1

10am-2pm

25th Annual Buddy Walk  
Hosted by Down Syndrome Association of Atlanta [Info](#)

13-14

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities Quarterly Council Meeting [Info](#)

26

12-12:45pm

Family Advocate Virtual Lunch & Learn  
Hosted by Georgia Coalition of Family Advocates [Register](#)

29

9am-1pm

2022 Walk-N-Roll for Spina Bifida – Atlanta  
Hosted by Spina Bifida Association [Info](#)



Submit an Event to GCDD's Event Calendar

## “Life is a journey, be prepared for the trip”: Destination Dawgs Brings Inclusive College Opportunities to University of Georgia

By Hilary Vece

Six years ago, inclusive college was in the news thanks to a [viral video of Jordan Huffman's](#) acceptance into the first University of Georgia (UGA) Destination Dawgs cohort in 2016. The video depicts Huffman in his room playing drums when he receives and reads aloud his acceptance letter to Destination Dawgs at UGA.

Housed in the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at UGA, Destination

Dawgs offers college options for students with intellectual disabilities in Athens, Georgia. Known as inclusive post secondary education (IPSE), inclusive college like Destination Dawgs is gaining in popularity throughout the state—and the country. There are [now 314 IPSE programs in the U.S. with eight \(soon to be nine\) in Georgia.](#)

Destination Dawgs is a two-year college program with four

semesters and a prerequisite Summer Leadership Institute. During the Summer Leadership Institute, students experience campus activities, eat in campus dining halls, and ride UGA buses. They have the opportunity to meet and talk to current UGA students and peer mentors. Peer mentors lead participants in activities that emphasize goal setting and leadership development. Students completing the Summer Leadership Institute receive





I am currently working at Fort Yargo State Park. I'm a Ranger, and I was connected through the program at Twin Lakes where I did my internship in the spring. I was taking classes at UGA at Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources through Destination Dawgs.

— Wyatt Martin, May 2022 UGA  
Destination Dawgs Graduate

invitations to apply to the two-year program. Upon completion of Destination Dawgs, students receive a UGA Certificate in College and Career Readiness from the UGA Center on Continuing Education. Since their first graduating class in 2018, there have been 15 Destination Dawgs graduates. This fall, the program will have a total of nine students.

“[Destination Dawgs] allows youth with intellectual disabilities to be part of the UGA campus, to take classes, to gain social and independent living skills, to make

friends, and just to be part of the Bulldog Nation,” said Carol Britton Laws, Ph.D., Director, Destination Dawgs. “Students who are part of the Destination Dawgs program will come away with the skills they need for a good adult life.”

Destination Dawgs is open to students with intellectual disabilities ages 18-25 with the personal desire, and family support, to gain skills for self-determination, independent living, and career development. Students must have completed high school and display the emotional and independent

living skills necessary to participate in coursework and campus life.

Destination Dawgs uses person-centered planning to facilitate goal setting and to track progress across five areas: Career Development and Employment, Academic Enrichment, Campus & Community Engagement, Building Independence, and Self-Determination.

The Destination Dawgs academic program is inclusive, meaning that students take foundational courses and courses that support each



Wyatt Martin, May 2022 UGA Destination Dawgs Graduate, at Fort Yargo State Park, where he works as a Ranger.



student's personal career goals alongside all UGA students who may or may not have IDD. Work-based experiential learning is another program pillar, requiring students to spend a minimum of three semesters participating in paid or unpaid internships.

Destination Dawgs aims for students to have the same experiences as all UGA undergraduates. Peer mentors help students identify campus activities they'd like to join, balance academic and social life, and make friendships. Students build independence through participation in campus service activities and student organizations, health and wellness seminars, workshops, and counseling. Students direct

their own daily schedules, learn to navigate the UGA bus system, and eat lunch daily with peer mentors.

Destination Dawgs peer mentors are fellow UGA students who volunteer to help students with academic support, such as library navigation and study partners, and health and wellness support, such as dining companions and exercise buddies. Peer mentors may also help students with social support by attending social activities or community service projects together. Peer mentors may also provide support for building independence by assisting with meal preparation and financial management.

Destination Dawgs is a Comprehensive Transition and

Postsecondary Program (CTP) which allows students with intellectual disabilities at institutes of higher learning to [access federal financial aid](#), such as the PELL grant.

Applications for fall 2023 admissions will open in mid-fall for invited Summer Leadership Institute alumni. Applications for the 2023 prerequisite Summer Leadership Institute will open this winter. For more information on UGA's Destination Dawgs, visit [FCS.UGA.edu/IHDD/Destination-Dawgs](https://FCS.UGA.edu/IHDD/Destination-Dawgs).

This piece is another in our [Include College series](#) highlighting Georgia's IPSE programs.



## Link INDEX

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*Organizing Your Child's IEP Binder:*

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/how-to-organize-your-childs-iep-binder>

*ASPIRE: Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement: A Student-Led IEP Initiative:*

<https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Documents/Transition/2020-21/ASPIRE%20Resources/ASPIRE%20One-Page.pdf>

*What is Assistive Technology?*

<https://www.atia.org/home/at-resources/what-is-at/>

*Adaptive vs. Assistive Technology:*

<https://dakotacil.org/2016/10/31/adaptive-vs-assistive-technology/>

*Parent to Parent of Georgia:*

[www.p2pga.org/roadmap/education/understanding-ieps](http://www.p2pga.org/roadmap/education/understanding-ieps)

*Lipson Advocacy:*

[www.lipsonadvocacy.com](http://www.lipsonadvocacy.com)

*Center for Parent Information &*

*Resources:*

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/meetings/#review>

*Facilitating Student-Led IEPs: OSSE Division of Specialized Education*

*Secondary Transition Webinar Series:*

[https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/documents/Facilitating\\_Student-led\\_IEPs.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/documents/Facilitating_Student-led_IEPs.pdf)

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*About Parent Mentors and the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership:*

<https://parentmentors.org/>

**Telling Our Stories: How The GCDD Storytelling Project is Lifting Voices in the Developmental Disability Community — page 14**

*About The GCDD Storytelling Project:*

<https://story-collection.gcdd.org/>

*Telling Our Stories:*

<https://story-collection.gcdd.org/introduction>

*Hidden Voices Podcast:*

<https://story-collection.gcdd.org/our-podcasts>

*6,000 Waiting Documentary:*

<https://story-collection.gcdd.org/documentary-film>

*Treasure Maps: 2021 Georgia Storytelling Roadshow:*

<https://story-collection.gcdd.org/treasure-maps>

*Contact Shannon Turner:*

[ddstorytellingga@gmail.com](mailto:ddstorytellingga@gmail.com)

**COVID-19 Updates — page 18**

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Public Health Emergency Q&A:*

<http://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/legal/Pages/phe-qa.aspx>

*Georgia Department of Community Health: Appendix K Emergency*

*Preparedness Response Plans:*

<http://www.dch.georgia.gov/announcement/2020-04-10/state-georgia-announces-approval-appendix-k-emergency-preparedness-response>

*Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities:*

<http://www.gcdd.org/>

*Georgia Advocacy Office:*

<http://www.thegao.org/>

*Georgia Department of Human Services: Medicaid Unwinding:*

<http://www.dhs.georgia.gov/medicaid-unwinding>

**Real World Work Experiences Enable Inclusive College Students at Columbus State University to Emerge as Workforce Leaders — page 22**

*Guidance and Opportunities for Academic and Leadership Success (GOALS) at Columbus State University:*

<https://www.columbusstate.edu/tlc/goals.php>

*The Posh Peach:*

<https://www.theposhpeach.com/>

*Contact Stephanie Marshall:*

[goalsinfo@columbusstate.edu](mailto:goalsinfo@columbusstate.edu)  
[marshall\\_stephanie@columbusstate.edu](mailto:marshall_stephanie@columbusstate.edu)

**“Life is a journey, be prepared for the trip”: Destination Dawgs Brings Inclusive College Opportunities to University of Georgia — page 26**

*Jordan Huffman accepted to Destination Dawgs viral video:*

<https://mobile.twitter.com/universityofga/status/767829933443821568>

*Think College: Inclusive College Finder:*

<https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>

*Georgia Inclusive Postsecondary Education Consortium (GAIPSEC):*

<http://www.gaipsec.org/fast-facts.html>

*Federal Student Aid for Students with Intellectual Disabilities:*

<https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/eligibility/requirements/intellectual-disabilities>

*Destination Dawgs at University of Georgia:*

<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/i HDD/destination-dawgs>

*GCDD Include College Corner:*

<https://magazine.gcdd.org/category/topics/include-college-corner/>

**Share Your Feedback on the GCDD Making a Difference Magazine**

*Making a Difference Magazine*

*Satisfaction Survey:*

<https://forms.monday.com/forms/41d6960a303d4e21acb598f44d355422?r=use1>

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)  
2 Peachtree Street NW, Suite 26-246, Atlanta, GA 30303-3142  
Voice 404.657.2126, Toll Free 1.888.275.4233  
TDD 404.657.2133, [info@gcdd.org](mailto:info@gcdd.org), [www.gcdd.org](http://www.gcdd.org)

Managing Editor, Tianna Faulkner  
[Tianna.Faulkner@gcdd.ga.gov](mailto:Tianna.Faulkner@gcdd.ga.gov)

Claritas Creative LLC, Publication Design & Production  
[Visualize@ClaritasCreative.com](mailto:Visualize@ClaritasCreative.com)

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<https://magazine.gcdd.org>



The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is driven by its Five Year Strategic Plan (2022-2026) goals of systems change; self-advocacy; and targeting disparity and diversity. The mission of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities is to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for the wide spectrum of diverse people/persons with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play, and worship in their communities.