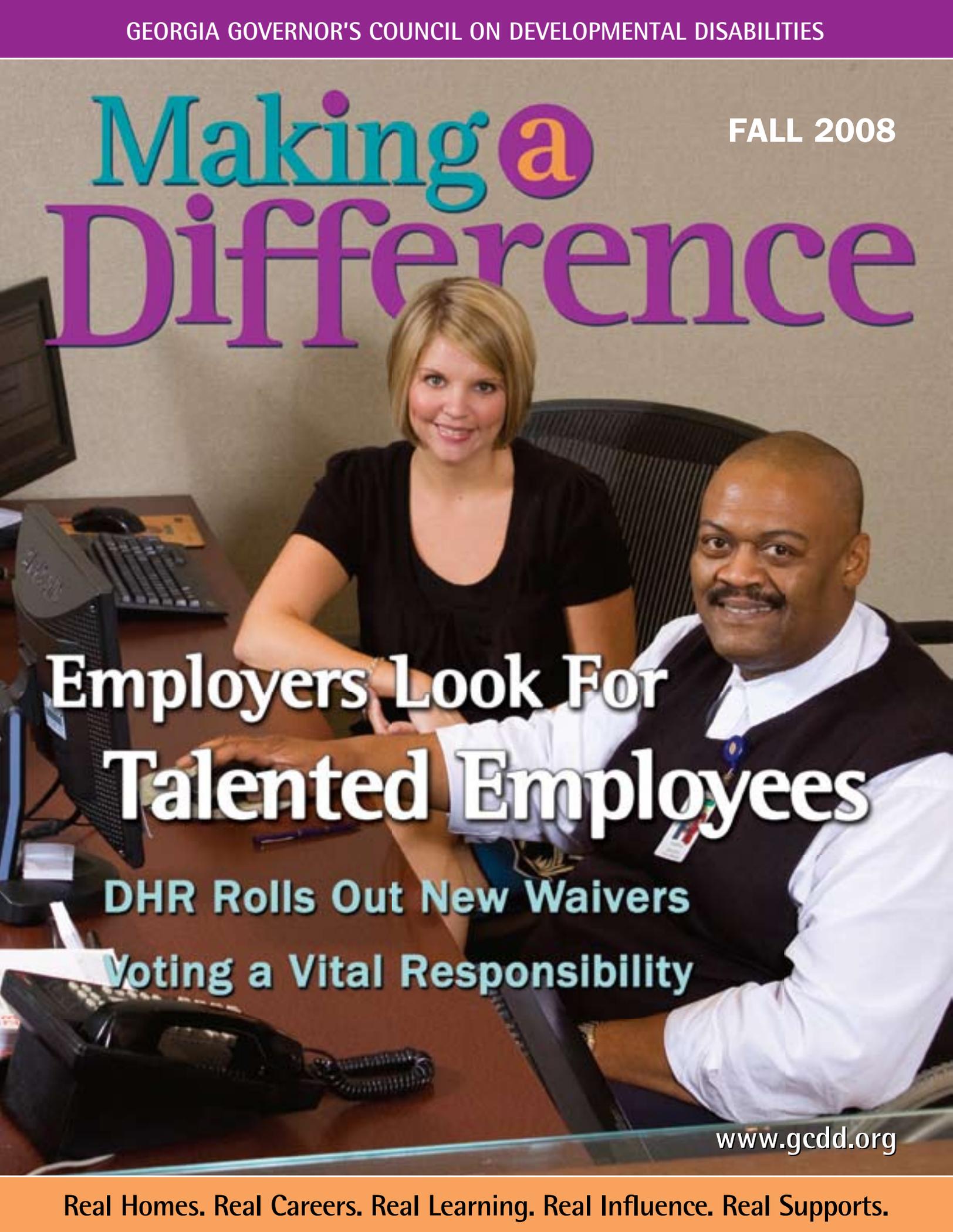


FALL 2008

Making @ Difference



Employers Look For Talented Employees

DHR Rolls Out New Waivers

Voting a Vital Responsibility

www.gcdd.org

A quarterly magazine of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities collaborates with Georgia's citizens, public and private advocacy organizations and policymakers to positively influence public policies that enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

GCDD provides this through education and advocacy activities, program implementation, funding and public policy analysis and research.

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2008: The Best of Times, The Worst of Times

As we begin to look back at 2008 – how will we describe it? Was it the worst of times or the best of times? We think there is an opportunity to describe it both ways.

The worst of times: The state and national economy continued to worsen. In Georgia, tax revenues are at least \$1.6 billion less than projected for the current year and it could be as much as \$2.5 billion before the year ends. As a result, Gov. Perdue has asked state agencies to reduce budgets by 6% and be prepared for some of the worst cuts that we have seen in quite some time. We expect there will be limited if any increase in the number of services and supports available for people with developmental disabilities. Rate increases for providers have been eliminated and many state employees are required to take furloughs. Nationally, the federal government has had to bail out giant financial corporations and foreclosures on homes are at an all time high.

**Ask before you vote, and we can
make a difference.**

The best of times: There is a sense of hope about November 4th and the election of a new president. In 2004, nearly 61% of eligible voters voted in what was the largest turnout since 1968. Many expect 2008 to have an even larger turnout. For the disability community, this is an important election. First, you must vote. Regardless of which candidate you are supporting, people with disabilities and those who care about people with disabilities must vote. We have an opportunity to show that we have a powerful base that can turn out people to the polls and help get people elected. If you know someone who needs help getting to the polls ask them if you can help. Second, ask the candidates where they stand on issues important to people with disabilities. Do you know where the U.S. presidential and legislative candidates stand on the Community Choice Act? This

legislation will shift the balance of federal programs toward home and community-based services instead of institutional care. On the state level, do those you are voting for support every effort to Unlock the Waiting List and move people from institutions to the community? Ask before you vote, and we can make a difference.

October is national disability employment month. While more than 70% of people with disabilities remain unemployed, there are efforts to change this. Conferences and discussions about how to increase employment for people with disabilities are planned. Employment First Georgia is working to ensure people have an opportunity to go to work as the first option, not the last. Others are working to educate employers about the diverse workforce that includes people with disabilities. Neil Romano, U.S. Department of Labor assistant secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy, will be the keynote speaker at the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities' Discovery Day October 30. He will talk about the efforts to increase the number of employees with disabilities.

Finally, GCDD has begun a year-long study to determine the ways it can work with graduates of Partners in Policymaking, Georgia Voices that Count, the Organizing Institute and others to help individuals with disabilities and their families create real change in communities across Georgia. The Real Communities Initiative is an opportunity to ask people what are the most important issues in their communities and what it will take to create the needed change.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Making a Difference. We want to hear from you. Please contact Editor-in-Chief Valerie Meadows Suber at 1-888-275-4233 or via e-mail at vmsuber@dhr.state.ga.us.



ERIC E. JACOBSON



TOM SEEGMUELLER

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Governor Calls for Restructuring of DHR

After forming a task force to study the needs of today's Department of Human Resources (DHR) compared to what they were at its inception 35 years ago, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue (R) announced in August the restructuring of DHR, and called for a Department of Behavioral Health, which will encompass the mental health and addictive disease programs that are currently housed in DHR.

"This restructuring of DHR recognizes those changing needs and puts in place a framework for a more efficient, effective delivery of these critical services," Perdue said.

"The task force was composed of representatives from both the House and the Senate," explained Patricia Nobbie, deputy director of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. The group was composed of Sen. Renee Unterman (R-Buford), Sen. Jack Hill (R-Reidsville), Rep. Ben Harbin (R-Evans) and Rep. Mark Butler (R-Carrollton). "There were also representatives from the governor's office staff." The task force began meeting officially in June and, along with its own investigation, heard from action groups around the state to attain a myriad of recommendations on the restructuring process. The task force released its findings July 25.

"It has been exciting serving with my fellow legislators and governor's staff as we look to transform the delivery of health and human services," said Unterman. "This has been a lot of work, and there still is a lot of work to do. This is a step in the right direction, and I look forward to working closely with the agencies, legislature and advocacy communities on these important changes."

"This is a positive step on the road to correcting our mental and public health systems."

The plan includes merging the Department of Community Health (DCH) with the public health and health regulation programs of DHR for a newly defined Department of Health. The remaining social services would fall under the Department of Human Services, which would include Developmental Disabilities, Aging, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and Child Support.

"This is a positive step on the road to correcting our mental and public health systems," Rep. Butler explained.

Current DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker is expected to lead the new Department of Human Services, with current DCH Commissioner Rhonda Medows leading the new Department of Health.

The proposal calls for legislation to be introduced when the General Assembly convenes next January with the transition to the new agencies occurring on July 1, 2009.

Nobbie explains that most people seem to take a very positive view of the matter.

"It's going to take a while to get used to, but we're all looking forward to seeing how the changes can enable us to better achieve our mission."



ADAPT Challenges HUD, Dems, McCain

Disability activist organization ADAPT challenged multiple policymakers on the housing crisis for persons with disabilities who have low and extremely low incomes in Washington, D.C. September 14 - 18.

The group set up a tent city at the headquarters of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and sent 100 activists to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) offices in Washington and another 100 to a Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) campaign office in Arlington, Va. ADAPT presented the entities with its platform for affordable, accessible housing.

"The DNC was cordial, and they accepted our housing platform, as well as our invitation to visit 'DUH City' (HUD spelled backwards)," said Barb Toomer, ADAPT organizer from Utah. "The career HUD staff that met with ADAPT told our people they had no authority to make decisions and had to wait for the administration or administrative appointees to make any decisions. Sen. John McCain's campaign staff not only refused to even look at our housing platform, they had 11 of us arrested."

ADAPT's housing platform points to America's longstanding and growing crisis in available, affordable, accessible and integrated housing. Many people with disabilities live on only 18% of the median income, a full 25% below the poverty level, and an amount that is less than the national average rent for a studio/efficiency apartment.

ADAPT is asking for:

- 5,000 new housing vouchers per year for 10 years, targeted to people transitioning out of nursing homes and other institutions;
- Twice as much funding for the construction of new housing that is affordable, accessible and integrated;
- Policies and procedures to track the new vouchers to assure they remain targeted to people with disabilities when the original user becomes ineligible or no longer needs the voucher;
- People with disabilities who reside in institutional settings to be recognized as "homeless."

For more information, visit www.adapt.org/. ●



Letters to the Editor

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

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GOVERNOR'S
COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

To Georgia's Disability Community,

This magazine is aptly named – *Making A Difference*. As I look back over the past six years, it is clear that we have all worked very hard together to make a real difference in Georgia's disability community by giving people options and choices while promoting job opportunities and independence.

That is why I believe Nov. 1 will be a day to celebrate and remember as the State of Georgia rolls out two new waiver programs that will make a difference in the state's ability to serve Georgia's disability community. With the introduction of the New Options Waiver (NOW) Program and the Comprehensive (COMP) Supports Waiver Program, both improvements over their predecessors, the state will be better able to serve people with disabilities who live at home or those requiring comprehensive, out-of-home care.

These new programs allow people with developmental disabilities to receive supports that best fit their needs and continue to encourage independent community living. With the new program, people have more options and can include job transportation or other services as part of their supports. These new waiver programs are being hailed as a national model around the country and are expected to reduce the number of people in institutions, offer more options to recipients and save tax dollars.

The good news doesn't stop there. Today, Georgia is ranked among the top 10 states in the country for increased allocations after ranking 50th just five years ago. My office, the legislature and advocates have all worked together to provide \$157 million in new state and federal funding over the past four years and have "unlocked the waiting list" like no other time in the history of our state.

Today, Georgia is ranked among the top 10 states in the country for increased allocations after ranking 50th just five years ago.

These are major accomplishments and major improvements in Georgia's service to the disability community. These programs embrace choices in employment, housing and supports. With our many job initiatives and new job opportunities, we can all see these improvements in the daily lives of our Georgians with disabilities.

These successes have been a cooperative effort over the past six years and we can all take pride in our accomplishments because it has been a true team effort. Thank you for your involvement, your leadership and the advocacy that you have brought to your community and the State of Georgia.



Sonny Perdue
Sonny Perdue
Governor



GCDD Restructures to Form the Real Communities Initiative

Change is the name of the game at the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities as advocates and leaders in the organization restructure to form a *Real Communities* initiative that will utilize the skills and talents of advocates who have been previously trained throughout the state to form inclusive projects and develop relationships further into their own communities, thus spreading the message of GCDD and disability advocates much further than ever before.

“We want to be engage members of local communities,” explained Eric Jacobson, executive director at GCDD. “We especially want to bring together the graduates of training programs such as Partners in Policymaking and Georgia Voices that Count...this is a way to link them both together.”

Partners in Policymaking and Georgia Voices that Count are not currently funded by GCDD in light of the new initiative, which will enable people with developmental disabilities, along with fellow

advocates, to “promote and integrate” GCDD’s focus areas, Real Careers, Real Homes, Real Learning, Real Influence and Real Supports, to citizens throughout the state of Georgia.

“Right now we’re in the learning stages, so it’s difficult for me to describe what will happen in the future.” Jacobson elaborated. “But we’re exploring lots of different models as we move forward with this project – it’s quite an undertaking!”

According to Jacobson, the next year will be devoted to researching ways to better involve and support the many Georgians who have already received advocacy training

through Partners in Policymaking, Georgia Voices that Count and other programs.

“We don’t think there are any other states that have tried something as extensive as what we’re looking at,” Jacobson stated. “[This initiative] is based on community development and organizing models of change. Those ideas have been developed by people like John McKnight, and written about by people like Robert Putnam.” Jacobson is careful to explain that these models haven’t necessarily been tied to the field of developmental disabilities before, but rather GCDD is attempting to tie these ideas into the change they’re attempting to create.

“We don’t think there are any other states that have tried something as extensive as what we’re looking at.”

Jacobson explained that the purpose of developing this new initiative was part of an effort to really bring disability issues to the forefront in the minds of Georgians. “[We want to] find out in local communities what people care enough about to actually act on, and what kinds of support do they need in order to act. And then we need to find the people in those communities who can help make those changes occur.” ●



“We especially want to bring together the graduates of training programs such as Partners in Policymaking and Georgia Voices that Count... this is a way to link them both together.”

Self-Advocate Sam Mitchell 'Shaking Things Up' in Heaven

Georgians with disabilities lost a dear friend and fellow warrior in the fight for equal rights when self-advocate Samuel Mitchell died August 18, just shy of his 58th birthday.

Mitchell, born September 27, 1950, fought for the rights of all people with disabilities, as a leader in organizations like ADAPT, People First of Georgia and Long Road Home. "He served as chair of the Atlanta ADAPT organization," explained Kate Gainer, Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities advocacy director and a close friend of Mitchell. "He was on

a very interesting first few days of marriage. "We spent our honeymoon at a national ADAPT meeting in Washington," laughed wife, Cheri Mitchell, recalling a tangle with police at that event. "That's when I knew I had married the right man." The couple would have been married four years in February.

The people who knew Mitchell best describe him as a man who was firm and passionate about fighting for disability rights, but also as one who loved to laugh and was kind to all. Gainer described Mitchell as a

"He was willing to face issues head on...as a result, he produced more leaders to finish the job."

the organizing committee of Long Road Home and treasurer of People First."

"He was willing to face issues head on," stated Mark Johnson of ADAPT. "His health didn't always allow him to do as much as he wanted, so he pointed people in the right direction...as a result, he produced more leaders to finish the job."

Mitchell's passion eked into his personal life, meeting his best friend and wife Cheri while crusading for disability rights. His zeal and enthusiasm led to

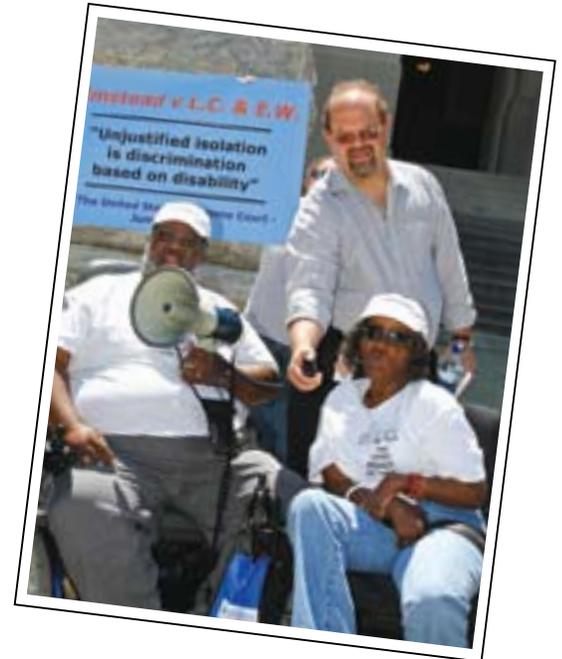
"big teddy bear," and Cheri Mitchell said that he loved a good joke. "He loved to make people laugh," she said. "He had a great sense of humor."

"He was my buddy," Gainer said. "In a lot of ways, I started out as his mentor as far as disability was concerned...but in many ways we kind of mentored each other."

The written word was a driving force in Mitchell's life, as he turned to poetry to express himself.

"He loved to write poems,"

Cheri Mitchell explained. "He wrote quite a few..."



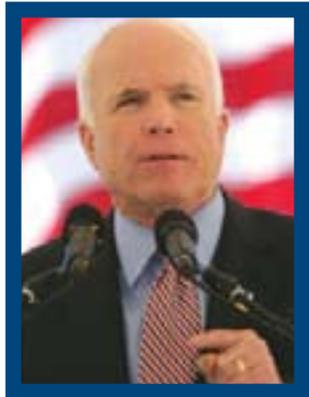
we read some of them at the celebration of his life."

She went on to describe an incident when Mitchell and Gainer visited a local high school for Disability Day nearly five years ago. "He was so mad by what he saw," she stated. "He thought it was just awful the way those kids were treated...with low expectations and as if they were second-class." Cheri Mitchell said he came home to write a poem about the experience, which was published in the 2003 GCDD Annual Report.

Those who knew and loved Mitchell agree that he will be impossible to replace. "If it's possible to shake up things in Heaven, Sam is doing it," Gainer said. ●

"The people who knew Mitchell best describe him as a man who was firm and passionate about fighting for disability rights..."

It's Election Time: The Race is On



It seems as though the theme for this year's campaigning presidential candidates' is 'change'...and the American public is hungry for it. Both Barack Obama and John McCain are running on the promise that they will be the ones to actually bring positive change to Washington, and subsequently, the entire country.

With such a heated contest, this is one of the most important presidential races in history, making it even more vital that anyone eligible not only registers to vote but also educates themselves on the issues and then votes for the candidate whose issues they most agree with.

"It's really important for people with disabilities to vote in this upcoming election," says Tia Nelis, representative of the national People First office. "There are so many important issues with the budget...a lot of people don't know that their services are in danger of being cut." Nelis said that there isn't just one particular issue to focus on, but rather there are many issues across the board that require the thoughtful attention of all Americans.

"Some [candidates] are supporting the Community Choice legislation while other candidates aren't. That will make a huge difference in whether people will be able to be a part of their community, or remain in institutions that they really don't want or need to be in," Nelis explained. She also cited health care, Medicaid and the threat of cutting Social Security as major issues that not only affect those living with disabilities but all Americans.

"It's so vital that people just educate themselves on these issues and the candidates' stances," she explained. "This election really

could mean the difference between having certain programs in place, or having them completely off the shelf."

Tripp Cook of the Georgia Disability Vote Project 2008 (GDVP) agreed that there are many issues to focus on in the upcoming election. Funding for certain projects, including the Katie Beckett waivers, could certainly be impacted by the election in November. "State budgets could certainly be impacted if asked to cut back," he explained. "Citizens with disabilities, and in fact entire communities, can be negatively impacted if we don't educate ourselves and have our say on the matter."

"Citizens with disabilities, and in fact entire communities, can be negatively impacted if we don't educate ourselves and have our say on the matter."

However, Cook is quick to point out that it's not all about the voting. He explained how important civic engagement is in voting and beyond. "Our responsibility as Americans is epitomized in the act of voting. It is the single, most influential act a person can participate in."

Cook went on to say that the purpose of GDVP is to encourage people to become energized around particular issues that impact the disability community. "We're ultimately looking for something beyond the actual voting activity," he stated. "The way communities interact with government agencies impacts us in our daily lives."

How exactly do you educate yourself on these issues? Martin Matheny, communications director for the Georgia Democratic Party, suggests that Americans can learn more about Barack Obama's views on disability issues from his Web

“Our responsibility as Americans is epitomized in the act of voting. It is the single, most influential act a person can participate in.”

site, www.barackobama.com/issues/disabilities. Information on John McCain can be found on www.johnmccain.com.

Ben Fry, executive director of the Georgia Republican Party, explains that Georgians with disabilities will vote for McCain because of his long record as a politician. “Senator McCain and Governor Palin have a record of achievement and a long track record of putting principles before politics,” Fry explained. “Americans are looking for a president and vice president who have demonstrated a long record of delivering results. It’s no wonder that Georgians are supporting the McCain/Palin ticket.”

Regardless of which candidate you support, the one thing everybody can agree on is the importance of becoming involved with the political process. “This is not a time of inertia. This is a time of active, dynamic change, and we can be a part of it!” Cook stated.

A Guide to Voting: Everything You Need to Know in November

There are many resources to utilize if you’re confused about where your designated polling place is. First of all, your voter registration card should inform you of your polling place and its address. It should also provide information on which voting districts you belong to.

If you cannot locate this information on your registration card, the Secretary of State’s Web site has an informative “Poll Locator” tool for you to input your name, county and birth date. “On our Web site, sos.ga.gov, there’s a special ‘2008 Election Center’ section,” Georgia Secretary of State Karen Handel explained, which is where the “Poll Locator” can be found. This tool also provides

a map and driving directions to your polling place once you input your information.

If you still need assistance or do not have access to the Internet, there are a couple of other options. “You can also contact either your local county registrar or elections office, or the Secretary of State elections division at 404-656-2871,” Handel continued. “They should be able to assist you from there.”

Need a Ride to Your Local Polling Place?

According to Matheny, Barack Obama’s campaign has teamed up with the state Democratic Party to provide transportation to the polls on Election Day.

“Folks can contact their local Campaign for Change office,” Matheny instructed. “Campaign for Change is a joint project of Obama for America and the Democratic Party of Georgia, and will be providing rides to the polls.”





Vice-presidential candidates... **WHO ARE THEY?**

Joe Biden

– An Experienced Legislator

Biden, a senator from Delaware, has been serving in the United States senate since 1972 at the age of 29. According to his Web site, he has “always been a strong supporter of the Americans with Disabilities Act.” As for his voting record, Biden voted ‘yes’ for both the Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 1996 and the Equal Pay Bill in 2008. Biden also introduced a bill which designated June 2007 as National Aphasia Awareness Month.

Sarah Palin

– A Conservative Maverick

The Alaskan governor promised Americans with disabilities that they would have a “friend and advocate” in the White House during her convention speech, along with expressing her support for Alaskans with disabilities seeking employment while she was running for governor in 2006. As governor, she signed legislation that increased funding for children with special needs.

You can find a list of the Campaign for Change offices at my.barackobama.com/page/contents/gaoffices.

On the GDVP Web site, www.gdvp.org, a forum is provided under “Ride Finder” for Georgians to find rides to polling places on their own initiative. “Very few people actually utilized the service when offered,” Cook stated. “As it can be rather expensive to organize, and so few people took advantage of it, most groups don’t offer rides to the polls anymore.”

If you cannot find transportation, the state allows residents to vote via absentee ballot which can be requested 180 days prior to an election, but are not given the day before or the day of an election. A ballot can be downloaded off the Secretary of State’s Web site, or obtained from your local county registrar’s office.

To participate in early voting, visit your county’s early voting site, where you will be asked to fill out an application and provide a valid photo ID. Locate your county’s early voting site location at www.sos.ga.gov or 404.656.2871. Advance Vote Week in Georgia is October 27 – 31. Most counties have multiple voting centers and extended hours.

What do you do if you get there, and the polling place isn’t accessible?

All polling places should be accessible for all Georgia voters. “In the Georgia Code 21-2-265, sub-section D, it clearly states ‘No polling place shall be selected or used under any circumstances which does not have suitable and appropriate access for persons with disabilities for the purpose of voting,’” Handel detailed.

If there are any concerns over polling place accessibility, Georgia law allows for citizens to vote via absentee ballot. If there is a problem concerning your access to a polling place on Election Day, Handel advises you to immediately contact your county elections office.

If you think you’re being denied the right to vote due to a disability, you should also contact the Georgia Advocacy Office at 800.537.2329 after you speak with your local elections office. ●

Making A Difference, One Day At A Time

The heroes and advocates of the disability community gathered in July for the annual Making a Difference Awards Ceremony of the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities for recognition of their valiant efforts on behalf of Georgians with disabilities.

“This year, we decided that there were two issues that the disability community experienced - increased awareness and changed policies,” stated Tom Seegmueller, GCDD chairperson, at the beginning of the evening. “We spent much of this past year creating public awareness around the need for homes to be more physically accessible.”

“In addition, we have seen progress toward making sure that no person with a disability resides in state institutions,” added Denny Spear, GCDD’s interim vice-chairperson.

Eric Jacobson, executive director of GCDD, said, “Because of all of our efforts, we are closer to the day when we can imagine a state in which no public institutions exist for people

with developmental disabilities. We can also imagine that waiting list for home and community-based services is minimal, and that individuals and families have the authority to decide what services they want and who will provide those services. We can imagine a day when Georgia ranks not at the bottom in providing supports to individuals with disabilities, but once again is near the top and is looked upon as an innovator!”

LEGISLATIVE AWARDS

GCDD honored legislators Rep. Mark Butler (R - Carrollton) and Sen. Nan Orrock (D – Atlanta) for their leadership roles in providing accessible housing to Georgians with disabilities.

Orrock was recognized for her work with the New Home Access Act and the Housing Accessibility Study Committee. “I was honored to be included for recognition,” Orrock stated.

“Eleanor Smith – a real ‘shero’ of mine – has worked for years bringing this issue in front of the legislature. I’m committed to diligently pushing this issue forward...

it won’t be a short battle, but it’s a very important one.”



Top: GCDD’s Pat Nobbie and Eric Jacobson present Rep. Mark Butler with his award.

Below: Sen. Dan Moody (center) was honored for his work on early testing.

**“Because of all of our efforts,
we are closer to the day when we can
imagine a state in which no
public institutions exist for people
with developmental disabilities.”**

Sen. Nan Orrock (right) poses with Jacobson and Patricia Puckett.



Rep. Butler was recognized for his sponsorship and efforts to pass HR 1632, a resolution that would provide a legislative study committee on accessible housing issues.

Sen. Dan Moody (R – Alpharetta) and Rep. Doug Collins (R – Gainesville) were additionally recognized for their work in early periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment. Sen. Moody was recognized for his work on SB 507, which affirms federal language on the EPSDT provisions of the Medicaid Act. Rep. Collins was also recognized for his efforts and attention to legislation on EPSDT.

“The first step in treating any disease or development disability is to raise public awareness.”

“The first step in treating any disease or development disability is to raise public awareness,” said Moody. “This is why the work of [GCDD] is so vital, because we’re not only raising awareness, but we are also impacting the lives of those who deal with these disabilities in a very positive way.”

Rep. Collins, an Air Force Reserves chaplain, was unavailable for comment due to deployment to the Middle East.

Barbara Rose (center) accepts the Advocate of the Year award from John Dallas and Jacobson.



ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

Barbara Rose accepted the Advocate for the Year award on behalf of the Action Group for Visitability and Eleanor Smith from presenter, John Dallas of

GCDD. “The Action Group for Visitability has been leading the effort to make every new home built in Georgia not only a place where the proverbial heart is, but also where its occupants can be – heart, body and soul – for as long as they choose,” Dallas commented.

“I was very pleased to be given this award,” Smith enthused. “I’m especially pleased because it’s not just an individual award, but an example of people working together.” Smith explained she is particularly happy that this isn’t an award presented by a group looking in from the distance, but rather as an effort between GCDD and the Action Group for Visitability. She explained that the Action Group for Visitability is working to solidify alliances between the generations so that accessible housing becomes more of a reality for all.

EXCELLENCE IN MEDIA

Two media professionals, Bobbie Battista and Travis Fain, were awarded with the Excellence in Media awards. “On more than one occasion, Bobbie graciously offered her considerable expertise and precious time to support GCDD’s mission for real careers,” GCDD Public Information Director, and

“My nephew has Asperger’s Syndrome...it is up to all of us to help make his world, and others with disabilities, a better one.”

organizer of the awards ceremony, Editor-in-Chief of *Making a Difference* magazine Valerie Meadows Suber said in her introduction of the former CNN anchor.

“The Action Group for Visitability has been leading the effort to make every new home built in Georgia not only a place where the proverbial heart is, but also where its occupants can be – heart, body and soul – for as long as they choose.”



"I appreciate the award, and I wish [GCDD] good luck with their cause."

Travis Fain of the Macon Telegraph was recognized for excellence in media.

"It is truly a privilege to be associated with GCDD," Battista stated. "My nephew has Asperger's Syndrome...it is up to all of us to help make his world, and others with disabilities, a better one."

Fain, a reporter for the *Macon Telegraph*, was commended for a story on a group of Partners in Policymaking participants visiting Central State Hospital. "He needed to be gently prodded and persuaded to accept this recognition tonight," presenter Rita Young said. "This tells us he is a person of integrity, and that quality translates into a thoughtfulness he brings to his work."

"I appreciate the award, and I wish [GCDD] good luck with their cause," stated Fain.

C. ANTHONY CUNNINGHAM COUNCIL MEMBER OF THE YEAR

The C. Anthony Cunningham Council Member of the Year was established four years ago to honor

a GCDD member who has exhibited commendable leadership. Seegmueller announced that Tameeka Hunter is the recipient of the award this year. "She's one of those individuals who embodies what we talk about when we discuss people with disabilities," Seegmueller stated. "She epitomizes the new wave of leadership coming from the younger generation. They lead by example, instead of just talking the talk."

"Since I have a congenital disability, cerebral palsy, I have a vested interest in trying to ensure that [the disability community] gets our needs met," Hunter explained. "My entire professional career has been devoted to the disability community, so it's an unexpected honor to receive recognition for doing something you are passionate about."

Jacobson closed the evening by quoting the first president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel. "Hope is a state of mind. Either we have hope within us, or we don't." ●

My entire professional career has been devoted to the disability community, so it's an unexpected honor to receive recognition for doing something you are passionate about.

Tameeka Hunter accepts the Cunningham award from GCDD Chair Tom Seegmueller.



Fain poses with the Partners in Policymaking students he covered, from left: Angie Saylor, Rita Young, Cynthia Branch, Judith Steuber, Debra Gibson, Dorothea Cadet and Julie Beem.



Sweeping Waiver Changes Signal New Day

FOR GEORGIANS WITH DISABILITIES

By Carmel G. Hearn

It's a new day in Georgia. On November 1, 2008, the state's Department of Human Resources (DHR) will roll out two new waiver programs that will significantly change the way the entire system works. The new waivers will replace a cumbersome 21-year-old program that has often been criticized for being too restrictive with one that offers flexible and fully self-controlled allocations.

"Currently we have little control over how services are provided, said Karen Addams, whose adult daughter, Mary Anne, has profound intellectual disabilities. "My daughter gets personal support services. The provider chooses the caregivers. It's a confusing system the way it is now."

The new waivers are actually amended and renewed versions of Georgia's two Home and Community-Based Waiver Programs for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Mental Retardation Waiver Program (MRWP) has been renamed as the New Options Waiver (NOW) Program and the Community Habilitation and Support Services (CHSS) Waiver Program is becoming the Comprehensive (COMP) Supports Waiver Program. The NOW Program will serve individuals who live

with family members or in their own home and the COMP Program will serve those who require comprehensive, out-of-home services or intensive, in-home services and those who do not otherwise qualify for the NOW Program.

"These waivers allow you to be part of Georgia life," said Dr. Steve Hall, director of the DHR's Office of Developmental Disabilities. "They give you support to become members of clubs, groups, associations. Your life won't be in the disability world. You will be in the real world."

Under the old system, waivers were often restricted to providing day services. The waivers did not encourage persons with disabilities to participate in the workforce or community. Under the new program, people with developmental disabilities can work with their support coordinator to receive the allocations that best fit their needs. That might include assistance with job transportation or a myriad of other new options.

"I think that it will give us more control over how the money is spent and who we have come into our home to care for Mary Anne," explained Addams. "Thus we will be able to maximize the dollars so she is getting more services for the same money."

The new waiver programs, administered by the Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities & Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD) division of the DHR, are being hailed as a national model and come on the heels of other sweeping

"For the most part, you can serve THREE people in the community for the same cost as serving ONE person in a hospital."



"I think that it will give us more control over how the money is spent and who we have come into our home to care for Mary Anne."

Mary Anne Addams will now have more flexible service choices that ensure she remains in the community where she likes to spend time with her sister, Caroline, right.

Your life won't be in the disability world.
You will be in the real world.

reforms enacted by the Georgia Legislature. Just five years ago, Georgia was ranked 50th in the nation with allocations, but has now moved to 9th in the nation shrinking the waiting lists. The state has provided \$100 million in new funding. The new waiver programs will allow thousands of Georgians to become employed for the first time in real jobs in their communities. They will also significantly reduce the number of people in institutions, at a cost savings to the taxpayers.

“Every bit of research shows community-based service is far superior to serving people in the hospital.”

explained. “Every bit of research shows community-based service is far superior to serving people in the hospital.”

Although the program is undergoing a radical change, it will also remain the same for anyone who does not want or need a change in the services they receive.

“No services go away,” assured Hall. “Everything they have now stays. It’s the family’s choice.”

“I know that the new waiver is designed to give us flexibility whether she has to go to a program or whether we can develop an individualized program for her,” added Addams. “I am looking forward to it, and it will definitely be a positive change.”

Hall also said the program is designed to accommodate an aging population of persons with special needs. It follows the individual regardless of their age or income, and continues to provide the support they need when they outlive their parents.

“There are 17,118 people in Georgia with developmental disabilities who have family members

“For the most part, you can serve three people in the community for the same cost as serving one person in a hospital,” Hall

over 62 years old,” said Hall. “This says everything about what we’re trying to do. They now live as long as we do.”

According to Hall, one out of every 70 Georgians is eligible for community access services, and he has spent the past year getting the word out about the new waiver program through town meetings, as well as radio and television ads. But he acknowledges there may be many Georgians (or their caregivers) who don’t realize they are eligible for aid.

“The public school systems know about us. We continue to do outreach to nursing homes. But Georgia is a big state. There are areas where there are people with disabilities and they are not aware [of the services available to them]. We are doing everything we can to get the word out.”

To find out more about whether you or a family member may be eligible for services, talk to your health care provider or school counselor. Or, contact the MHDDAD regional office in your area by clicking on www.mhddad.dhr.georgia.gov and select “contact information” or call 404.657.2258 or email clcampbell@dhr.state.ga.us for general information and for referral to the regional office that includes your county. ●

The NOW Program will serve individuals who live with family members or in their own home and the COMP Program will serve those who require comprehensive, out-of-home services or intensive, in-home services and those who do not otherwise qualify for the NOW Program.

McCain Has Record of Support

By Donna Jones

National Coordinator, Americans with Disabilities for McCain Coalition



Donna Jones is the Coalition Coordinator for Americans with Disabilities at the McCain Campaign. Born with spina bifida, she joined the campaign in February 2008 to aid in the outreach effort. Deeply committed to helping people with disabilities become involved in the election process, she advocates for empowerment via voting and communicating the needs of Americans with disabilities to each of the campaigns. After traveling to Argentina and Guatemala and seeing how people with disabilities live without proper medical treatment, Jones made the decision to become an advocate in Washington for Americans with disabilities. She is on the Board of Directors for the Spina Bifida Association of America.

It was September of 2007 and I was moving to Washington, DC to pursue my dream of being a disability advocate. The presidential campaign was in full swing and I envisioned being a volunteer for a candidate whose record speaks of being a champion for Americans with disabilities.

A search on the Internet produced facts that Sen. John McCain had proven his commitment to empowering persons with disabilities since his early days in Congress. Armed with this information I headed to McCain headquarters to see how I might be of help to the campaign. The staff welcomed me and listened to my convictions that the Senator would support our desire to be self-reliant and to be active members of society. I thanked everyone for their time and willingness to listen to my ideas.

In November we must get out the vote for the candidate we believe will support policy that addresses our needs.

Forty-eight hours later I was offered the position of National Coordinator of the Americans with Disabilities for McCain Coalition. My duties include, but are not limited to, reaching out to disability advocates and people with disabilities to address the communities' concerns; coordinating policy recommendations for McCain's platform, and supporting grassroots' efforts to encourage our community to vote for Sen. McCain. I, a woman with spina bifida with first-hand knowledge of the realities of living with a disability, had been hired to advocate for people with disabilities in a presidential campaign! This single action speaks volumes to Sen. McCain's commitment to directly involve our community in this very crucial presidential election.

We have experienced first-hand the positive impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act in our lives,

but how many of us are aware Sen. McCain played an integral part in drafting key sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act? Along with Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Sen. McCain introduced language to Title V of the ADA that required common telecommunications carriers to establish and maintain an interstate and intrastate Telecommunications Relay Service accessible to the speech and hearing impaired.

Two years before the ADA passed, Sen. McCain introduced the Telecommunications Accessibility Enhancement Act of 1988, to assure that the Federal telecommunications system is fully accessible to hearing-impaired and speech-impaired individuals. He was also a chief co-sponsor of the Television Decoder Circuitry Act of 1990 which required new TV sets to have a built-in decoder capable of receiving closed-captioned programming. The ADA was amended this year to be more inclusive in its coverage to prevent discrimination against people with all disabilities. Sen. McCain became a chief co-sponsor, and this week this remarkable piece will be passed by Congress and sent to the president for his signature.

In November we must get out the vote for the candidate we believe will support policy that addresses our needs. We are not just any voting block; we are the largest minority in the country whose vote can sway an election. I am proud to give my vote to Sen. McCain based on his overwhelming record of support for people with disabilities. I have only mentioned a small part of his disability record in this article, but I am happy to have the opportunity to address why I support Sen. McCain as my choice for president. Remember that when you go to the polls this November, Sen. McCain introduced a bill that would amend the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act to ensure that no individual be denied the right to vote in a federal election on the basis of having a disability. Actions speak louder than words, and Sen. McCain has an advocacy record that makes the difference for Americans with disabilities. ●

Campaign workers with disabilities share why they are voting for their candidates.

Obama Says “Yes, We Can”

By Kareem Dale

National Disability Vote Director, Obama for America

Hope. Change. “Yes, We Can.” For many, these are just words. But for Americans with disabilities who grew up without closed captioning, descriptive video, computers that talk, accessible forms of communication and the Americans with Disabilities Act, words are at the foundation of progress. And these words ring true with the promise of a better tomorrow, of educational equality, of equal access to employment, of the right to live independently, of the ending of discrimination based on disabilities and that all Americans will be treated equally. Sen. Barack Obama embodies the qualities needed in our next president to ensure Americans with disabilities will have a full, fair and equal opportunity to compete for every scholarship, award, job, athletic contest, movie role and every single thing that a person’s mind can fathom.

For far too long, words have been used negatively to stunt the progress of Americans with disabilities. As a partially blind person, the word “can’t” has been said so many times to me, it might as well be tattooed on my chest. And now, we have a candidate who says, “Yes, We Can,” and who is committed to real change. With this change comes true empowerment and the realization that anything is possible.

Sen. Obama’s legislative record illustrates his staunch support of Americans with disabilities. He sponsored and voted for a bill that created the Emergency Evacuation Plan for People with Disabilities Act. He also sponsored and voted to create the Abuse of Adults with Disabilities Intervention Act, which protects adults with disabilities from harassment, intimidation and interference with personal liberty. I believe these examples demonstrate he is a man on whom Americans with disabilities can rely.

His future plans and policies also give Americans with disabilities reason for hope. Sen. Obama is willing to hold Congress’ feet to the fire by ensuring it holds up its end of the bargain and funds 40% of the excess costs of educating children with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act rather than the 17% it funds now. In addition, Sen. Obama is going to invest \$10 billion per year in early education and

developmental programs for children between zero and five.

We also have a candidate who is going to ensure there is sufficient funding for vocational rehab programs, which are critical to supporting Americans with disabilities through college and graduate programs. I could not have succeeded in college or law school without vocational rehab services, but they must be substantially improved. Sen. Obama is ready to institute the necessary improvements.

Americans with disabilities deserve to have equal employment opportunities. Sen. Obama is willing to start with the federal government by increasing its recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement of workers with disabilities. He also will ensure that Americans with disabilities can more effectively participate in the labor market by creating a commission to address work disincentives in Social Security Disability Income, Supplemental Security Income, Medicare and Medicaid.

I am honored to work for a candidate who supports the right of Americans with disabilities to live independently. Sen. Obama is a sponsor of the Community Choice Act, which will give Americans with disabilities control of their living arrangements.

From ensuring voting locations are fully accessible, to appointing judges who enforce the ADA, to providing additional funds to the EEOC to enforce discrimination laws, to expanding the Family Leave Act, Sen. Barack Obama is the candidate to lead the push for equality for Americans with disabilities. Speaking as one of those Americans, I am proud to advocate on behalf of the next president of the United States, Barack Obama, who I believe will substantially improve the lives of all Americans with disabilities. ●



Kareem Dale is founder and chief executive officer of The Dale Law Group (DLG) in Chicago. In his role as Disability Vote Director, Dale, who has a visual impairment, is responsible for all disability outreach efforts for the Obama Campaign, including attending national conferences, coordinating grassroots efforts, speaking at events as a surrogate for the campaign, and ensuring that campaign locations are accessible for all Americans with disabilities.

For far too long, words have been used negatively to stunt the progress of Americans with disabilities.

Employers Find Talent in Employees with Disabilities

Choosing the right person for the job is important to Christopher Fullagar, director of human resources at the InterContinental Hotel in Buckhead.

"We look anywhere we can to find and develop talent. The area of people with disabilities is an important pool of talent that in my estimation is largely untapped," he said. "I've had a really good experience hiring people with disabilities. They have been stable and reliable employees."

When Fullagar met Melody Beal and saw her welcoming smile, he knew her sunny disposition would make a perfect addition to the staff of the hotel's XOXO Café for employees.

"I like being around other people," Beal, who has worked at the hotel for about a year, said.

She particularly enjoys the company of her supervisor, Pamela Scott. "She's a good person. She helps me out when I need help," Beal said.

The hotel currently has three people with disabilities on staff, according to Fullagar.

Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) Diversity Manager Karmetria Dunham Burton said hiring people with disabilities is important to the corporation. "We make a good effort to ensure they are part of the hiring process. We also educate hiring managers on folding people with disabilities into the hiring process," she said.

And the company's Atlanta headquarters is demonstrating its commitment with Darrell McGhee, the receptionist and "face" of IHG.

McGhee, who uses a wheelchair, has had a good experience with IHG over the past six years. "They're very conscious of possible problems I might have, but fortunately I don't have that many. I remember one year they had a Christmas party off-site and wanted to make sure I could attend it, so they bought a portable ramp for me, just so I could attend the party," he said.

IHG, along with Southern Company, Georgia Power and SunTrust, is also a sponsor of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities' 8th Annual Discovery Day October 30, featuring keynote speaker Neil Romano, assistant secretary of the U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy.

"The number of people with disabilities who are employed is abysmal." While ODEP does not have exact unemployment figures, Romano estimates about two-thirds of people with disabilities who would like to work do not have jobs.

"One of the major things I'm working very hard on is explaining to employers about the value of people with disabilities in the work place. They improve the value of the bottom line.

"The first thing I tell employers is that when you hire people with disabilities, you'll get an employee with talent who can do a job."





Stephen Aquilino

Employers should look at a person for what they can do, not what they can't," he said.

"I'm not looking for people to do this as a charity. I want employers to hire people with disabilities for the value they bring. Thirty-nine million baby boomers will retire in the next 10 years. Employers will need to fill those spots, and this is a great talent pool."

One way to recruit employees with disabilities is through ODEP's Employment Assistance and

"Employers should look at a person for what they can do, not what they can't."

Recruitment Network (EARN) that match job applicants with employers.

"The first thing I tell employers is that when you hire people with disabilities, you'll get an employee with talent who can do a job. They bring a perspective – disability is just another way to bring diversity to the work place. Diversity is always the beginning of innovation," Romano said.

Some employers are concerned about providing accommodations for employees with disabilities.

"One of the first steps for employment is overcoming concerns employers may have," Romano said.

ODEP has created the Job Accommodation Network to provide information for employers about employees with disabilities. The network offers consulting services, publications and information about reasonable accommodations for employees.

Fullagar, like many employers, found he made only minor accommodations for his employees who have intellectual disabilities.

Melody Beal and Quinn Ethridge lend their talents at the InterContinental Hotel in Buckhead.

Medicaid Buy-In Prevents Loss of Benefits

Georgia recently passed Medicaid Buy-In legislation that allows people with permanent, but stable, disabilities who are working or want to return to work, to purchase health care coverage through the Georgia Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities Program (GMWD). GMWD provides the same services as other "full Medicaid" categories of assistance.

To Qualify for GMWD, an Individual Must:

- Be a Georgia resident.**
- Be at least 16 years of age but under 65.**
- Have a disability that meets Social Security Administration's standards.**
- Be employed and receive compensation.**
- Have disability income between \$600 - \$699/mo.**
- Have countable income less than 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).**
- Have resources less than \$4000 for individual, \$6000 for couple.**

Depending on an individual's age and income, a premium payment may be required for this health care coverage. GMWD premiums are based on three tiers. Individuals with countable income less than 150% FPL are not required to pay a premium. The monthly premium for individuals with countable income of 150% to 249% of FPL is \$35 dollars. The monthly premium for individuals with countable income of 250% to 300% of FPL is \$50 dollars. For more information, contact the Department of Community Health at 404-651-9982 or visit www.gmwd.org to download an application.

Employment First Builds Grassroots Support

While Georgia has been hailed as an innovator in customized employment for people with disabilities, much of that recent innovation has been limited to the metro-Atlanta area. Employment First Georgia (EFG) wants to change that.

"We got folks together to create a common vision of what it would look like if everyone with disabilities who wanted to work was working," explained Ruby Moore, who is the executive director of the Georgia Advocacy Office and currently serves as the director of EFG, a collaborative effort that brings together advocates, self-advocates, employers, family members, service providers and government officials to ensure employment is considered the first option when determining how to spend day supervision dollars for Georgians with disabilities.

"Employment First is advancing policy and systems change by demonstrating what's possible," Moore said.

To continue to build on the positive achievements Georgians with disabilities have made in customized employment, EFG has just begun a Stewards for Employment program that identifies grassroots leaders across the state who will work to promote increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

"We've identified 40 enormously talented leaders to help us envision what exactly the Stewards for Employment will be doing, such as helping people directly, supporting employers to have a more active role in creating good job opportunities for people with disabilities, promoting policy change within their current job responsibilities or assisting people overcome obstacles to employment. The process has really just begun. It's very exciting," Moore said. "We are figuring out how to get more traction with what we're already doing in provider development, starting microenterprises, changing policies and practices and ensuring people who can work are seen as employable and are getting good jobs."

To do this, EFG needs the support of employers, state agencies, service providers, people with disabilities and their families. "We need to address systemic obstacles and maximize use of resources. We need statewide training for people with disabilities and their families about customized employment. We need very significant demonstrations of what's possible and how to do it," she said.

"A broad collaborative base will create systemic change and make it less difficult for people to access employment," she concluded.

"The main thing we had to do was help them find their location – it can be challenging for memory recall to get from where the bus drops them off to where they clock in, change uniforms, etc. The service elevator was the biggest challenge, but it was very easy to resolve. We just put their names by the button they were supposed to push," he explained.

"A lot of the accommodations were just show and tell – just walk around with them until they felt comfortable. All three had job coaches through Briggs & Associates between one and two months. The coaches still check on them once a week," he said.

One employee, Quinn Ethridge, works in the *garde manger* kitchen plating cold foods for banquets and the hotel restaurant. He does not speak, so some communications accommodations have been made for him. "The chef instructs him by demonstrating how to put the food on the plates, then he will say, 'Now you do it for me.' And Quinn will demonstrate that he understands," Fullagar said.

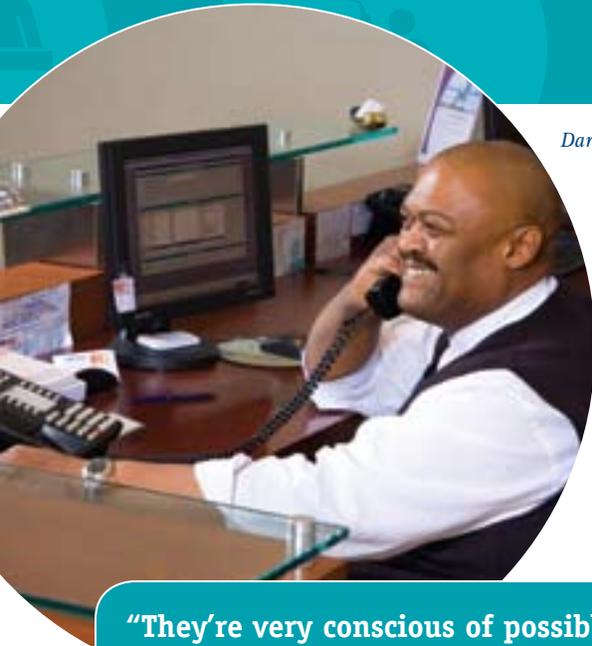
While most accommodations are relatively inexpensive, about \$500 or less, some employers may be eligible for tax credits to offset the costs, according to Richard Keeling, a senior tax analyst for the IRS' Outreach and Education Department, who is scheduled to speak on a Discovery Day panel.

"With the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the employer can receive a credit for hiring a person with a disability during the first year of employment," he said.

Additionally, other credits are available to help remove physical access barriers, such as the Disabled Access Credit for small businesses. To qualify, the business must make less than \$1 million or have fewer than 30 employees. "If they modify their business, they can get a credit up to \$10,000. If they put a ramp in, they can get just about the full amount of it back," Keeling explained.

The Architectural Barrier Removal Deduction allows any business to deduct up

"With the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, the employer can receive a credit for hiring a person with a disability during the first year of employment."



Darrell McGhee is considered the "face" of IHG corporate headquarters.

"They're very conscious of possible problems I might have, but fortunately I don't have that many."

to \$15,000 to cover any accommodations the company made. "Some taxi companies are using this deduction to make themselves accessible."

In addition to incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities, the IRS also offers tax credits to employees with disabilities.

"Each year the Earned Income Tax Credit lifts more than five million people over the poverty line. It's a huge credit, and it doesn't have any effect on public benefits such as Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid or food stamps. A refund is not considered income and it doesn't hurt eligibility," Keeling said.

"Tax refunds from the EITC can be worth up to \$4700. Sometimes it's the largest amount of money the person will see that year," he said.

Keeling urges Georgians with disabilities to take advantage of some of the IRS' free tax preparation sites. "We've done research, and 1.5 million people with disabilities are not filing tax returns who would likely receive a refund or credit if they did.

"In West Palm Beach, a woman with a disability went to one of our free tax prep sites. She was eligible for the EITC, then found out she was eligible for the previous three years as well. She received refunds of about \$15,000. These refunds helped her buy a car, get a better job and continue her education. She got into an Individual Development Account program with some of the refunds and after three or four years was able to

buy a home. Her whole life was changed just by finding out about the EITC," he revealed.

Individual Development Accounts, or IDAs, are matched savings accounts. Whatever a person saves can be matched up to 200%, depending on the program. The accounts must be used for secondary education, home ownership, a car or microenterprise development. The accounts allow people with disabilities to save money without affecting eligibility for Supplemental Security Income.

"The Center for Financial Independence is trying to set up an IDA program in Georgia for people with disabilities," Keeling said.

But Romano hopes the tax incentives aren't the only thing stimulating employers to hire people with disabilities. He said it just makes good business sense.

"Roughly 50 million people have disabilities in this country. How do you market to them? Having people with disabilities on the team makes perfect sense," he said.

"People with disabilities want to contribute, and quite frankly, they can," he said.

The federal government is taking advantage of that desire in several ways. "The IRS started a hiring initiative in October of 2007. The federal government wants all agencies to have more than 2% of employees who are blind or have physical or cognitive disabilities. The IRS has more than 3% in our division," Keeling said.

And Romano is excited about a new ODEP program called America's Heroes at Work that helps veterans who have traumatic brain injuries or post traumatic stress disorder to find and keep jobs.

"This program addresses something that rarely gets discussed. Employers can find out what they can do immediately to help mitigate problems. With TBI, the employee might need to be moved to a quieter area. Minor accommodations can help employers keep valuable employees on the job," Romano said.

The bottom line is that hiring people with disabilities is a win-win situation for everyone.

"I look purely at the talent they have. Each one of these individuals has something I need as a business operator. We have something they need. So it is a partnership. The results are very positive," Fullager said. ●

**GCDD's 8th Annual
DISCOVERY DAY
October 30
9 AM – 1:30 PM
CROWNE PLAZA RAVINIA
— Atlanta —**

**Employers learn
how the talents of
employees with
disabilities will help
their businesses.**

SEE PAGE 31 FOR DETAILS.



“When they become more proficient, the job coach will back off, but the students will always be monitored for at least an hour to an hour-and-a-half a day by the job coaches.”

Hall County Project SEARCH interns are working at Northeast Georgia Medical Center.

Successful Program Implemented Across the State

Casey Craig is following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother by going to work at her local hospital.

“I make deliveries to other departments all by myself. I like meeting new people,” she said.

Craig, an intern at Walton Regional Medical Center, is one of eight people participating in a new Project SEARCH site in Walton County.

Project SEARCH is a successful jobs program first brought to the metro-Atlanta area by the employment firm Briggs & Associates, with support from the Fulton County School System, the Georgia Department of Human Resources and the Georgia Department of Labor-Rehabilitation Services.

Walton interns combine classroom and hands-on work to improve job skills.



“The staff is treating the interns like regular employees.”

The program has been such a success at Atlanta’s Emory Crawford Long Hospital and SunTrust that the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities wanted to replicate it across the state.

“We originally said we’d help start two a year, but at the kick off meeting, we had 266 people from 58 school systems attend,” explained Dottie Adams, GCDD’s individual and family support director. “People were really eager and anxious to learn this and put it into practice.”

From that meeting, five school districts – Hall County, Walton County, Coffee County, Albany City and Savannah City – have launched Project SEARCH programs and three more are in the development stages.

The program is a collaborative effort to help people transitioning from high school to work find meaningful and fulfilling employment through on-the-job training.

GCDD is providing coordination and technical assistance for the project. The school districts, work sites, Briggs & Associates and Georgia Department of Labor – Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) all help set up the project.

The school districts provide job coaches and classroom instruction; the job sites, such as Walton Regional Medical Center where Craig works, provides classroom space and mentors; Briggs & Associates helps define the rotations; and VR helps pay for service providers.

Dianne James, who coordinates the Walton Project Search site, explained the Medical Center has seven stations set up in various areas of the hospital, including the operating room, emergency room, materials management, medical records, guest services and food services. Students get to try jobs in several areas.

“Each student goes through three 10 – 12 week rotations. We initially place them in a job where they can be successful. After they complete the first rotation, they have to interview for their other two rotations with the job supervisor, myself and job coaches. They are chosen for the jobs based on the interview,” James said.

Potential jobs include making IV starter kits, stocking rooms, delivering specimens to the lab, filing, organizing supplies, collecting linens,



sterilizing equipment, greeting and escorting patients and guests, preparing food, delivering meal carts to the different areas and more.

"We start off with everyone having a job coach. When they become more proficient, the job coach will back off, but the students will always be monitored for at least an hour to an hour-and-a-half a day by the job coaches," James said.

"The rotations they go through during the school year will teach them a number of marketable job skills. The goal is to get hired."

"The students are enjoying it tremendously. They've become part of the team. They're eager to start eating lunch with their job mates, and they're fitting in beautifully," she continued.

Craig is enjoying her rotation in the materials management area of the hospital, where she keeps vital supplies stocked and organized, such as surgical masks and medical supplies.

"I met Sherry, and she's very nice. She helps me make deliveries. Taffy is nice, too," she said.

Craig is hoping to work more directly with patients in her next two rotations. "I like to help the patient out with whatever they need. I can make sure the wheelchairs are clean for patients or make the beds up," she said.

While the program gives the participants great training opportunities, it's also had a positive impact on the hospital. "One intern was packing IV kits and noticed they were different colors, but they were all being stuffed into a big basket. He suggested they group them by color, and this simplified things for the rest of the department," James said.

"The interactions I've seen have been excellent. The staff is treating the interns like regular employees. They're already beginning to form friendships with the mentors in their departments, which gives them a little extra support beyond the job coach," she said.

Adams is glad to support the growth of this program. "It really looks for jobs that are challenging and marketable in settings where businesses found those positions to turn over a lot.

When they are trained in these areas, the interns become really top notch employees," she said.

"Eighty-five percent of interns get hired after the program is complete," she continued.

"We were looking for a program to help us provide a real transition from school to the work force, and Project SEARCH filled the bill for that," James said.

GCDD funded training for representatives from each site in Cincinnati, where Project SEARCH began, as well as funding attendance at a national conference in Seattle.

"Project SEARCH offers similar programs for adults in other areas, but we are targeting high school transition areas because there is such a great need there," Adams said. "Students usually participate during their last year in school. The rotations they go through during the school year will teach them a number of marketable job skills. The goal is to get hired," Adams said.

James agreed. "The end result would lead to employment either here at the hospital or somewhere else that can use the skills they've developed," she said.

"I would like to work in the hospital after school. Granny Craig works on the nursing unit. I like working here. I'm glad I'm helping people," Craig said. ●



Casey Craig ensures doctors have the supplies they need.

"Eighty-five percent of interns get hired after the program is complete."



Advocates Thunderously Protest Controversial Film

Ret*rd

It's a word that is as hurtful to people with intellectual disabilities as the "N" word is to African Americans. And yet it is used frequently by society in both jokes and insults.

Disability advocates in 25 states across the country rallied against the use of the hated "R" word in the film *Tropic Thunder* when it opened in August.

"People with disabilities have been treated for decades, even centuries, in such a demeaning way, and words are hurtful," said Deirdre O'Brien, executive director of the ARC of Georgia, who organized protests in eight locations across the state.

"It's absolutely offensive when you have disabilities or a child with disabilities. People ask me what's wrong with my daughter. There's nothing wrong with her. Her disability is just part of her, it's not all she is," O'Brien explained.

Advocates in Atlanta, Macon, Alpharetta, Albany, Savannah, Newnan, Jonesboro and McDonough protested at local movie theaters the day *Tropic Thunder* opened, with about 15 – 20 people at each site. Protests were organized through the

cooperation of ARC, People First of Georgia and Down Syndrome Society of Atlanta.

Kate Gainer, the advocacy director at the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, attended the Atlanta protest. "*Tropic Thunder* is a symptom of a bigger problem. The fact that the writers of *Tropic Thunder*, along with the general public, feels it's OK to use the word 'retard' without any forethought says something about the value society places on people with disabilities. People with disabilities is the last group society feels OK to put down."

Charles Judson, communications director of the Atlanta Film Festival also went to the Atlanta protest.

While he does not support censorship, he said, "I definitely understood their point of view. It was very valid. The real issue to me is that when it comes to showing people with disabilities in films, Hollywood does a really bad job. Fifty four million Americans have a disability – we don't really see many people with disabilities on screen.

"I think people with disabilities would have the most impact if they reached out to producers and writers to educate them about how they can integrate people with disabilities."

"I think people with disabilities would have the most impact if they reached out to producers and writers to educate them about how they can integrate people with disabilities. It's so rare that disabilities are shown. One negative portrayal can really impact people's opinions."

Gainer said self-advocates were trying to make inroads into the entertainment world. "There are people with disabilities who have their own public TV and radio shows. There are actors with disabilities working in major markets of the media.



**RESPECT
IS THE NEW
R-WORD**

“It’s absolutely offensive when you have disabilities or a child with disabilities. People ask me what’s wrong with my daughter. There’s nothing wrong with her. Her disability is just part of her, it’s not all she is.”

We’re ready and willing to do our part. We have to be forever vigilant in addressing issues as they come up,” she explained.

Unfortunately, *Tropic Thunder* isn’t the only movie to portray people with disabilities negatively, according to Dr. Jenny Manders, disability studies coordinator at the Institute for Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia.

Manders and five of her students recently completed an independent study called Disability in the Media. “We worked to identify the portrayal of people with disabilities on TV shows and movies and evaluate them about the message they send,” she said.

The results were discouraging. “We found more negative portrayals than positive. There’s still a lot of stereotyping of people with disabilities. But it varies. People with physical disabilities are portrayed as courageous, but also as pitiable. People with intellectual disabilities are still objects of ridicule and jokes,” she explained.

“As a society, we’ve done a better job of examining biases regarding race and gender. Bias against people with disabilities has not really been examined. Especially against people with intellectual disabilities – our thinking is still based on stereotypes. Because of this, jokes have more power and reinforce the prevailing thinking about people with disabilities. Jokes directed at people with disabilities have more power, I think, to hurt.

“We’re decades behind race, gender and sexual orientation when it comes to examining disability issues in terms of diversity. It’s critical that we evaluate what’s put out in the media in that context. Our thinking about disability as diversity is not that far along compared with other groups,” she said.

Not everything the group watched was negative. “We found some very positive portrayals

of people with disabilities on *ER*, *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Private Practice*. Multiple episodes of *ER* were excellent and featured characters with Down syndrome and cerebral palsy,” she said. “Media needs to be reflective of the whole person instead of just the disability aspect. It needs to present people in positive, realistic ways instead of reinforcing stereotypes.

“Unfortunately, we didn’t find many recent positive examples in film for intellectual disabilities, though there were several good films about mental illness and physical disabilities, such as *A Beautiful Mind* and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*,” she said.

Older positive examples of people with intellectual disabilities included *I Am Sam* and *The Other Sister*. The recent TV movie, *Riding the Bus with My Sister*, was also pointed out as a good example.

“If we made a couple of people think about the ramifications of what they say before they say it, then the protest was worth it.”

But as negative examples continue to pop up, advocates will continue to struggle against them. “Just about everyone who grew up with a disability has been put down because of it at some point in their lives,” Gainer said. “We are tired of it and we’re not going to take it any longer. If we made a couple of people think about the ramifications of what they say before they say it, then the protest was worth it.”

O’Brien agreed. “If I educated one person doing this thing, then it’s a success.” ●



Know the Myths and Facts About Employment

By: Kate Brady, Georgia Office of Developmental Disabilities



Kate Brady is the director of Employment Policy and Programming in the Office of Developmental Disabilities within Georgia's Department of Human Resources and works to grow the access Georgians with developmental disabilities have to customized employment. She collaborates with Employment First Georgia and previously worked for the Cobb & Douglas Community Services Boards as their customized employment coordinator. She coordinated Project Exceed, a US DOL ODEP Customized Employment Grant intended to support people with disabilities in reaching customized employment goals.

Job sites are where individuals negotiate their identities, independent from disability labels. In a culture in which among the first questions we ask each other is "What do you do?", our jobs are our gateways to participation. They facilitate activity and audibility; they lend us voice and power. For this reason, the Office of Developmental Disabilities values integrated, individualized employment supports and outcomes for all people regardless of disability level.

The many systems that are funded to support individuals in accessing valued roles in their communities must work together to serve in a coordinated, effective fashion. I'd like to empower people seeking services with information that allows for specific expectation of service coordination.

Myths and Facts about the Employment Process:

Myth #1: I'll need to go get tested to find out what I can do.

Fact #1: Employment goals should be driven by interests and strengths, not disability label or its "severity."

Myth #2: I can only work if I know how I'll get there.

Fact #2: While transportation can be a barrier to employment, it is not a measure of preparedness. A multitude of creative solutions for getting to work can be accessed once the location is known.

Myth #3: Certain jobs are better for certain disabilities

Fact #3: Job fit is a wonderful construct as complex as each individual and job situation. Labels cannot predict someone's satisfaction or success on a job; only the attention paid to job development and match can predict success.

Myths and Facts of Social Security Benefits, Earned Income & Medicaid Waivers:

Myth #1: You can only earn up to \$940 per month and retain SSA benefits.

Fact #1: This threshold applies only to Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), and is different for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Options like 1619B, Individualized Income Thresholds, and the Medicaid Buy-In make working and retaining Medicaid feasible.

Myth #2: If you get SSI and Medicaid, you will always get SSI and Medicaid.

Fact #2: If you work and pay into Social Security or have a parent who collects Social Security, your benefits could change from SSI and Medicaid to SSDI and Medicare and you would need to apply for Medicaid Assistance Only (MAO) to retain waiver eligibility.

Myth #3: Your Social Security benefits can take care of themselves.

Fact #3: It is very important to report any changes in your situation to Social Security and respond promptly when Social Security requests information.

Myth #4: The new Developmental Disabilities (DD) Medicaid waivers make changes to the eligibility and earnings criteria.

Fact #4: The new DD waivers do not affect Social Security and Medicaid rules about earnings, resources or Medicaid eligibility. Individualized budgeting for waiver services is a separate process and does not affect Social Security benefits and earned income.

Myth #5: The Ticket to Work will affect my waiver eligibility and earned income thresholds.

Fact #5: The Ticket program has separate rules and services that do not affect waiver eligibility. Using the Ticket does not change Social Security's rules about working and cash benefits.

Myths and Facts about Funding for Employment and Training Supports:

Myth #1: Receiving special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) means I'll get a DD Waiver and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services automatically when I graduate.

Fact #1: Each system determines eligibility according to its own criteria and requires independent application.

Myth #2: Transition services cannot start until I'm in high school.

Fact #2: School transition services can begin at age 16 or when you begin high school, whichever starts first; VR services can begin at age 14.

Myth #3: I must exhaust one funding source before seeking support from another.

Fact #3: Services from a waiver, VR and Workforce Development Centers can work together to provide the services and supports needed to facilitate the desired employment outcome.

StraightTalk

The Ordinary ★ Patriot ★

By Patricia Puckett, *Executive Director*
Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia

When people hear the word “patriot”, predictable images appear in their heads - war heroes, flags, marching bands, solemn Memorial Day ceremonies or Independence Day fire works. But most of us are ordinary patriots – people who have a few, fundamental citizen responsibilities that – if acted upon – can change the world.

Among those fundamental citizen responsibilities is the act of voting. At first blush, that act doesn't seem complicated. One goes to the poll, touches a screen, talks into a microphone or pulls a lever and then goes back to the daily grind. But if one is to perform the act of voting in an enlightened, responsible way, it is a lot more work than that.

We're the largest societal segment I can think of that remains invisible, unacknowledged, silent... and unsolicited for our votes.

Getting to know a candidate, learning what he or she stands for and what he or she has truly accomplished is not easy task. A potential voter listens to months of advertising hype, is bombarded with biased blogs

and (we hope) recycles scores of slick mailers before the seemingly endless election season is over. What is the truth behind the 30 second sound bite intended to capture the heart and mind of _____? The reader can fill in the blank with any or all of the following segments of the citizenry: senior citizens; the youth; blue collar workers; white collar workers, NASCAR dads; soccer (now hockey) moms; African Americans; whites; Hispanics; urbanites, suburbanites, rural, green, women, conservatives, liberals, independents, progressives...and the list goes on.

Maybe I'm just jealous, but it hacks me off that the media never talks about “the disability vote.” We're the largest societal segment I can think of that remains invisible, unacknowledged, silent...and unsolicited for our votes. We have so much at stake, yet we vote less frequently than our peers without disabilities. Many of us remain jobless, rely on Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare and face a daily struggle to meet basic survival needs.

What candidate(s) will have the courage and wisdom to shore up our fragile economy, pay for a war, dig us out of a huge national debt and maintain the investment in services to people with disabilities?

The late Justin Dart said it best and said it often: “Vote as if your life depends on it – because it does!” I hope we finally hear him in 2008! ●



Pat Puckett is the executive director of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia, whose mission is the equal participation of people with disabilities in their communities. She works with many organizations to improve the lives of people with disabilities, including the Easy Living Home Coalition, People PAC, Unlock the Waiting List!, Disability Law and Policy Center and others.

Puckett graduated from Valdosta State College and attended graduate school at the University of Georgia. She was the first person with a disability to graduate from Leadership DeKalb in 1998.



Mia's Friends Help Her Picture Life

By Patricia Nobbie, Ph.D., Mia's Mom

Seventeen people met in our living room the first weekend in September to help Mia picture life in her own home. During a Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities meeting in Savannah when she turned 21, Mia raised her hand during a presentation on housing options and stated quite emphatically that she wanted her own apartment, with her own refrigerator and food, desk and office supplies and her own key. Since then, her world had shrunk somewhat, and she seems content to hang out in her room when she is not working. But I am planning to move to Atlanta when my youngest graduates from high school, and I would like Mia to stay in Athens with her friends, Sunday School class, camp, bowling team, favorite restaurants and places she knows how to navigate. She will still have lots of support in Athens from siblings and friends.

It seemed a bit overwhelming to her at first, but after she got comfortable, Mia had a great deal to say.

Dottie Adams ran the show. Many people from Mia's world – job coaches, direct support staff, friends, church members, bowling partner, siblings and their friends– were there. It seemed a bit overwhelming to her at first, but after she got comfortable, Mia had a great deal to say. I sat behind the sofa, and just listened. If you want to know the truth, Mia didn't let me get a word in edgewise. It slowly began to dawn on me that I alone did not have to organize her life.

People had ideas, Mia blessed or dismissed them, and pictures and plans went up on the chart paper. Renee volunteered to do some community safety education. Wanda volunteered to make sure she kept her church relationships up. Jenny will take her to WeightWatchers. Fabersha, Mia's support person, had several insights into what motivates her to get going in the morning and how we needed to change how we communicated when she needed to be places so she would be on time. Jennifer will explore other work. Other exercise options went up on the paper. We all came to the conclusion that she needed to "see stuff" out there, how people her age lived in college-town type settings, so her sister and her friends volunteered to have her hang out in their apartment and spend the night, and her other college student friends will do the same.

Knowing Athens, I was having a hard time picturing where she would live, and this made it hard for me to picture anything else. Safety and comfort, and her ease and knowledge for getting around independently are paramount. When Sarita mentioned an apartment complex where we had once lived, suddenly it all fell into place. It was affordable and familiar. We still had friends there. It was close to her job, the library, the schools she had attended, the cleaners, movie theatre and pharmacy, grocery store, all the businesses I still frequent. We made plans then for hanging out there, and renewing relationships in the neighborhood.

So now we have a picture. And we have allies and support. It's still scary, but I have faith that this community will welcome her. Mia is her own best ambassador. ●



OCTOBER

October 1 – 31

**National Employment of
People with Disabilities
Awareness Month**

October 16 – 17

**Georgia Independent
Living Network Meeting**

Voice: 770-270-6860

Toll Free: 888-288-9780

www.silcga.org

October 18

FOCUS Mom's Day Off

at Lake Lanier

www.focus-ga.org

October 22 – 24

**15th Annual Georgia
Association of Persons in
Supported Employment
Conference**

Jekyll Oceanfront Resort

Jekyll Island, GA

www.gapsenetwork.com

October 23

**Department of Community
Health Public Hearing**

CON Rule Changes

www.dch.georgia.gov

October 25

FOCUS Day at Zoo Atlanta

www.focus-ga.org

October 30

Discovery Day

Employees will learn how
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www.dialogue-in-the-dark.com

Tagged as both “an exhibition to discover the unseen” and “the greatest exhibition you’ll never see”, the widely acclaimed *Dialogue in the Dark* exhibit opened in Atlanta in August.

Visitors are led by guides with visual impairments through different settings in complete darkness. Relying on senses other than sight, visitors learn to interact and adapt in various situations, such as visiting a park or a bar.

Dialogue in the Dark was created to begin a conversation about the social exclusion of people with disabilities and the unequal chances they have in getting the same opportunities for education, careers, transportation and leisure activities. Over 5 million visitors have experienced the exhibit so far around the world, and over 5,000 people with a visual impairment have found employment as guides for this innovative project.



If you want something done right, do it yourself.



Below, please find further resources of information related to the articles in this edition of *Making a Difference* magazine.

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)

www.gcdd.org
404-657-2126 or
888-275-4233 (ASK-GCDD)

State Government

Department of Community Affairs

Georgia Housing Search
www.georgiahousingsearch.org
877-428-8844

Department of Community Health

www.dch.state.ga.us/
404-656-4507

Department of Human Resources

www.dhr.georgia.gov
404-656-4937

Department of Labor

www.dol.state.ga.us

General Information

www.georgia.gov

Georgia General Assembly

www.legis.state.ga.us/

Georgia House of Representatives

www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/house/index.htm

Georgia Senate

www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/senate/index.htm

Georgia Governor's Office

www.gov.state.ga.us/
404-656-1776

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office

www.ltgov.georgia.gov/02/ltgov/home/0,2214,2199618,00.html
404-656-5030

Election Day

Barack Obama's Website

www.BarackObama.com

John McCain's Website

www.JohnMcCain.com

People First of Atlanta

404-687-8890 ext. 101

People First of Georgia

678-755-6015

Georgia Disability Vote Project 2008

www.gdvp.org
404-521-1742

Rock the Vote

www.rockthevote.com

'Campaign for Change' Office Locator

my.barackobama.com/page/contents/gaoffices

Georgia Advocacy Office

1-800-537-2329

Georgia Democratic Party

www.democraticpartyofgeorgia.org

Georgia Republican Party

www.gagop.org

Georgia Secretary of State Karen Handel

www.sos.ga.gov
404-656-2871

Employment

Job Accommodation Network

www.jan.wvu.edu
800-526-7234
877-781-9403

Earned Income Tax Credit

www.irs.gov/eitc

Employee Assistance and Recruitment Network

www.earnworks.com
866-327-6669

Georgia Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities (Medicaid Buy In Information)

www.gmwd.org

Income Tax Preparation Center for Financial Independence & Innovation

404-541-9005

Media

Tropic Thunder Protest

www.thearc.org
301-565-3842
800-433-5255

Atlanta Film Festival

www.atlantafilmfestival.com
404-352-4225

Mental Health

Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities & Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD) division of the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)

mhddad.dhr.georgia.gov
404-657-2258



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

DISCOVERY DAY

October 30, 2008 • 9 AM – 1:30 PM
Crowne Plaza Ravinia • Atlanta

This half-day executive briefing shows businesses how to benefit from hiring people with developmental disabilities. Concrete take away information includes tax incentive and hiring advice/job development expertise. Richard Warner of Georgia Public Broadcasting and What's Up Interactive will moderate the 8th Annual Discovery Day that will include success stories from:

- Keynote Speaker: Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, Neal Romano
- Carolyn Cartwright, SunTrust
- Roslyn Dickerson and Christopher Fullager, IHG
- Angela Mackey, Walgreen's
- Carmen Jones, Solutions Marketing
- Susie Rutkowski, Project SEARCH

GCDD thanks its corporate sponsors InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), Southern Company, Georgia Power and SunTrust Banks, Inc.

Reservations are free but spaced is limited. Visit www.GCDD.org for more information or call 404.657.2122.



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The Selig Center

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This year's presidential election is more important than ever. Please remember to vote November 4.

See where the candidates stand on the issues:

John McCain:
www.johnmccain.com

Barack Obama:
www.barackobama.com

VOTING RESOURCES: Find a ride to the polls: www.gdvp.org • Find your polling place: www.sos.ga.gov



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