

Making a Difference

FALL 2005

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Employers Tap Into Disability Labor Market

How Media Shapes the Image of Disability

Perspective: Transitioning Student Overcomes Employment Barriers



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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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To Georgia's Disability Community,

When people have the ability to provide for themselves, they have hope even during the hardest times. This is why our jobs and careers are so important to all of us. While every human life has value, that doesn't diminish that fact that we all need to feel productive.

People with disabilities in Georgia face a variety of challenges in seeking employment. The state's role is to assist individuals in becoming as independent as possible and to create opportunities for them to take responsibility for their lives. For this reason, I am renewing the state's commitment to principles that will help people with disabilities become integrated into the Georgia workforce.

Our current commitment to community-based services will continue to be implemented using the principle: the money follows the person into the community. When people with a disability live in the community, they challenge themselves to learn new skills, and they are driven to set and accomplish goals. To maximize the personal drive of individuals, the state in return must create opportunities to find the supports they need to be successful in the workforce.

Supports must be offered in a manner where the person chooses based upon quality, cost and need. Choices must be individualized, giving people only the supports they need without building inefficient programs that offer a package of supports that include services the individual doesn't need. Often times, individuals are forced to accept these inefficient packages in order to receive the services they do need.

Educational and job training programs must meet the special needs of persons with disabilities. These programs must be in settings that are accessible to persons with disabilities and in career fields that pay a fair wage, so individuals have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

I have also requested the leaders of state agencies to work with persons with disabilities, their families and advocates to find better ways of implementing state and federal programs. Many regulations in these programs actually work to keep individuals in poverty and dependent on the system. We need programs that do just the opposite; our programs need to achieve independence and improve the quality of life well beyond the poverty level. As faulty programs or regulations are found and solutions are developed, we will work with the appropriate federal agencies make these programs more productive.

Creating employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is going to take all of our best thinking and can only be accomplished by working together. I look forward to our continued partnership as we work to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.



Sonny Perdue
Sonny Perdue
Governor



Real Job Opportunities Still Lacking

All People With Disabilities Shall Be Afforded Valued, Gainful Employment Regardless Of Level Of Disability. This is the vision promoted by the Institute on Human Development and Disability, Georgia Advocacy Office and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. It is a statement about the direction that Georgia needs to move in so that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity for a real job. For GCDD, a real job is paid employment that reflects the achievement of, or progress toward, a living wage and is based on informed choice.



We all have seen the statistics that over 75% of adults with disabilities who want to work are unemployed. Georgia was seen as an innovator in helping people with disabilities go to work. What made Georgia a leader was that those working in supported employment helped people get jobs from a strength-based approach; identifying an individual's interests and strengths and then creating jobs that value the individual.

In Georgia, over 700 children with disabilities graduate from school each year. The system must be transformed so that students don't leave school just to sit at home or spend their day in a place where their talents are wasted. Instead, we must demand for students that employment is the primary option after graduation and then work with the business community to develop jobs and supports.

In previous editions of *Making a Difference*, we reported on the progress made through the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy grant Jobs For All, which has developed customized employment opportunities for a few individuals in a small part of Georgia. While this grant completes its work, we are exploring options to financially sustain it through the adoption of public policies that support its vision. Our policy recommendation called "Georgia Employment First" means that employment will become the primary option for how people with disabilities spend their day. Individuals will have the opportunity for paid work in integrated work settings with competitive wages and benefits and the necessary supports to be successful.

We believe there is support for this policy with policymakers and the business community. At a recent presentation before the Georgia Business Leadership Network, United States Business Leadership Network Chairperson Katherine McCary from SunTrust Bank made the

case for why businesses are looking to employ persons with disabilities. Businesses recognize that a diverse marketplace and workplace are instrumental to keeping the bottom line (profits) growing. To have a diverse marketplace, businesses must be willing to hire those to whom they hope to sell. People with disabilities represent a \$1 trillion market and must be part of the changing workplace.

Employers recognize employees with disabilities as capable and productive workers. However, employers have limited awareness of the supports that are available to assist individuals with disabilities. It is our job in government and social services to introduce employers to potential employees who have the talents and skills to work. We must also let them know that there are supports available to them and their employees. Finally, we need to recognize that the training the social service system has provided does not meet the needs of most employers and needs to be incorporated into employer-developed, on-the-job training efforts.

In our society, having a job is THE measure of productivity and integration into a community. With a job that pays you a valued wage, you earn money to purchase goods and services. You can go to the mall and buy clothes or a DVD. You can go to the grocery store and buy food. You can purchase or rent a home. You can go on vacation. You also pay taxes so that you give back to the community. Without the means to earn an income all of these things become difficult, if not impossible.

"For GCDD, a real job is paid employment that reflects the achievement of or progress toward a living wage and is based on informed choice."

October is Disability Employment Awareness and Disability Mentoring Month; let us use this time to explore incentives and initiatives to support those who want to work. This edition of *Making a Difference* will focus on these efforts and how we can all work together to make employment an option for everyone. We welcome the opportunity to print thoughtful responses to specific articles published in *Making a Difference*. You can reach me at 1-888-275-4233 or you can e-mail me your thoughts at eejacobson@dhr.state.ga.us.

Eric E. Jacobson
Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD



The disability community lost one of its most passionate advocates - Natalie Tumlin - October 1. We mourn the loss of her fighting spirit as we celebrate the many contributions Natalie made to the Unlock the Waiting Lists! campaign.

Eric E. Jacobson

Look for a tribute to Natalie Tumlin in the January edition of Making a Difference.

New Chairperson Looks Forward to an Exciting Year

As I sit to write this first letter as Chairperson of the Georgia Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the old adage, "Be careful what you ask for" immediately comes to mind. Fortunately, any momentary apprehension that I have over the challenges ahead dissolves as I shift my focus to opportunities that this role will provide.

During the past few years as a council member, I have had the opportunity to observe and work with GCDD's professional staff. During this period I have found them to be one of the most highly qualified and motivated teams that it has been my privilege to be associated with. As many of you may know, GCDD is in the final stages of reviewing our goals and objectives and refining our organizational structure to meet them.

To say that this is an exciting time to serve on GCDD would be an understatement. The course that we have charted requires that each member serve actively on the standing and special committees that are now being formed. It is imperative that GCDD members take advantage of our restructuring process and step forward to support our staff in reaching these goals and objectives.

"As a council, I believe that it is imperative that we continue to stay 'in tune' with the total spectrum of disability issues facing Georgians and not be captivated by individual tunnel vision."

our message will not only be heard but change can and will occur.

I look forward to hearing from and working with each of you in the future. With your input and personal advocacy, we have and will continue to make a difference.



Tom Seegmueller
Chairperson, GCDD



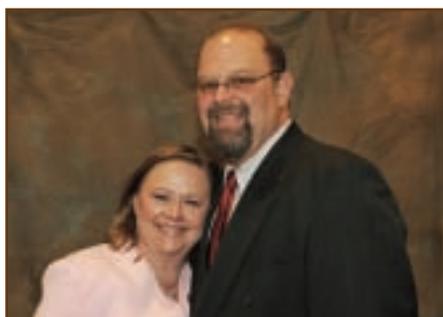
Bragg Steps Down after Dedicated Service

After six years of faithful service, Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Chairperson **Lynnette Bragg** is stepping down. She will still serve as a council member.

"Lynnette embodies the idea that authentic leadership experiences spring from the genuine concern for the growth, well-being and empowerment of all people. Even when faced with the passing of her son Matthew, she continued to lead GCDD in a positive direction," said incoming Chairperson **Tom Seegmueller**. "She has been a strong advocate and has made sure that GCDD's agenda reflected the idea that communities can only be built on the strengths and capacities of all those citizens, including

those with disabilities who call that community home."

Bragg, who was appointed to GCDD in 1992, has been active from the beginning. "She has been a real and constant leader in the disability movement in Georgia. She has been a teacher and mentor," Seegmueller said.



Lynnette Bragg and Eric Jacobson



2006 Board Members (from top left): Chris Hunnicutt, Denny Spear, Vallorie Butler, Tom Seegmueller, Janet Hill, Karen Boyer, Scott Crain, David Cowan (from bottom left): Gillian Grable, Millie Powell, Tom Connelly, Lynnette Bragg, Dr. Licheng Tian, Geneice McCoy.

GCDD Thanks Outgoing Members

After playing integral roles in GCDD for the past two years, the terms for five ex-officio members are ending. GCDD wants to thank **Susan Dennis, Hilary Elliott, Nalini Isaac, Geneice McCoy** and **Sharon O'Prey** for their dedicated service.

"The two-year term for these individuals is ending but their impact on the GCDD will be felt for a very long time. Each of these individuals gave their heart and soul to the efforts of the GCDD. They were willing to take stances on issues, do battle when battle was needed, and were always there when asked to volunteer. Although their terms as ex-officio members have ended, I know that we will continue to see them as members of the GCDD and leaders in the community," said GCDD Vice Chairperson Vallorie Butler.

Welcome New Members!

Representing People with Developmental Disabilities

Michelle Aulthouse, *Atlanta*
Tom Connelly, *Albany*

Representing Parents

Scott Crain, *Gainesville*
Bruce Lindeman, *Atlanta*
Dennie Spear, *Atlanta*

Representing Policymakers

Phil Pickens, *Atlanta*



Tom Seegmueller Becomes New GCDD Chairperson

By Christina Rosell

GCDD elected a new chairperson this quarter. **Tom Seegmueller**, a parent advocate and council member of five years, will serve as GCDD's chairperson, working for systems change for people with disabilities so they may have more independence, inclusion, integration and productivity through public policy research, analysis, reform, project demonstrations and education and training.

Seegmueller's son, Tyler, was diagnosed with autism 10 years ago, when he was two years old. Tyler has grown into a young man with a love for sports activity. "He is very active, and we enjoy doing a lot of things together," Seegmueller said. He enjoys fishing and scouting with his son and watching him participate in Team Extreme Wrestling, an inclusive sports team in Leesburg, Ga. "Wrestling is a team sport. They very much embrace all children, and they all have their opportunities," he said. "It's a great example of grassroots inclusion."



In the past, he has enjoyed working with GCDD Deputy Director Patricia Nobbie, Ph.D. on legislative issues and Advocacy Director Dottie Adams on family support plans. "It's been a good experience across the board," he said. "Many of the struggles and challenges we have faced have been the same, and I have certainly benefited from their experiences and anecdotes."

As the new chairperson, Seegmueller looks forward to his first task – researching the key legislative challenges for the upcoming session, such as a standardized diploma that would allow graduates to go on to institutions of higher learning.

Overall, he is honored to succeed former chairperson Lynnette Bragg.

"Lynnette has done such an excellent job for such a long time," Seegmueller said. "What I would like to see now is the council members themselves somewhat more active with committee work in conjunction with staff on these projects." Specifically, in addition to standing committees for ongoing issues, he will be encouraging GCDD members to form short-term ad hoc committees for key issues. "This will allow council members to work on issues they have a personal interest in and are passionate about. That will be a real benefit," he said. ●

"What I would like to see now is the council members themselves somewhat more active with committee work in conjunction with staff on these projects."



GCDD Vice Chairperson Vallorie Butler enjoys a quiet evening with her husband, David, and their 13-year-old daughter, Lexie.

Vice Chairperson Passionate About Children's Issues

Since 2002, **Vallorie Butler** has served as the vice chairperson of GCDD, supporting the chairperson's initiatives. She has been an active member of GCDD since 1998.

Butler's participation in the disability community began 12 years ago when her one-year-old daughter, Lexie, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Butler and her husband, David, enrolled their daughter into Babies Can't Wait, an early intervention therapy program in Georgia.

Since joining GCDD, she focuses on children's issues and educating parents. "The GCDD's mission is to work on projects that ensure people with disabilities get real education, real homes, real jobs and they have real choices in their lives," Butler said. "My particular focus has mostly been on learning and the threat of losing Medicaid." She explained that budget cuts cause the eligibility guidelines to change every year, making it harder for children to qualify for services. "I encourage parents to find out who their legislators are," she said. "Most legislators are very receptive. It's been a positive experience for me to get to know mine."

Currently, Butler and the other GCDD members are working on the Children's Freedom Initiative, a program to get children under 22 out of institutions across Georgia. ●

Outstanding Advocates Recognized by GCDD

Georgia's tireless disability advocates helped effect great change in the state this year with the funding of waiver slots to help move 925 people off the waiting lists and the defeat of a cap on the Independent Care Waiver Program.

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) honored some of the people who helped convince the governor and legislators to fund those spots and recognized all the attendees as playing a significant role in the victory July 21 in Stone Mountain, Ga.

"We have fought and fought to Unlock the Waiting Lists! for so many years, and to actually see these numbers in a budget is almost unbelievable," said GCDD Chairperson Lynnette Bragg.

"Tonight we celebrate our successes and hard work toward achieving a common vision of including all people in all parts of our communities, neighborhoods, cities and state."

GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson commended everyone in the audience for their efforts to improve the lives of people with disabilities. "As we celebrate and give honor tonight to people and organizations, let us be reminded there is no end to what can be accomplished if individuals, family members, providers, advocates and state agencies work together as equal partners to create change," he said.



Above: State Sen. Sam Zamarripa at Disability Day. Left: Rep. Jeff Brown

Legislators of the Year Award Sen. Sam Zamarripa, (D) District 36, Atlanta Rep. Jeff Brown, (R) District 69, LaGrange

Sen. Sam Zamarripa (D-Atlanta) and Rep. Jeff Brown (R- LaGrange) were honored for their efforts on behalf of people with disabilities.

"With their support and participation we were able to work with the General

Assembly to understand the real impact of the proposals that were made and how best to address them. They were willing to meet with individuals, parents and family members," said Dave Blanchard, public policy director for the Atlanta

Alliance on Developmental Disabilities.

Sen. Zamarripa has been involved in the disability community for a long time because his sister has a disability.

"He has been an outspoken advocate for his sister's needs and for those with disabilities. Because of this very personal connection, 'Senator Sam' is there whenever we need him, whether it is speaking at Disability Day or on the senate floor about our issues. He is eloquent because he truly understands the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families," Blanchard said.

Rep. Brown is the Chair of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Health and Human Services and convened hearings on the budget that were well-organized, inclusive and responsive, while showing a great deal of respect for people testifying who had severe disabilities.

"Rep. Brown met with advocates about budget concerns and worked with providers on compromises over rate increases. He also protected the waiting list slots," Blanchard said.



Tom Corwin

Media Professional of the Year Award
Tom Corwin, Augusta Chronicle

Tom Corwin of the *Augusta Chronicle* was honored for his responsible media coverage of the often complex set of public policy issues that challenge people with disabilities.

Valerie Meadows Suber, public information officer for GCDD explained, "Public attitudes and awareness of disability issues are greatly affected by what people read, see and hear in the media. Tom Corwin not only responds to our call to tell our stories, he listens and actually gets it right. His articles regularly provide accurate analysis and sensitive portrayals that we in the disability community deeply value."

"Public attitudes and awareness of disability issues are greatly affected by what people read, see and hear in the media..."



Ashley Rhinehart and Andreena Patton

Advocate of the Year Award

Kiley Hays, Greg Harry, Edwin McWilliams, Andreena Patton, Samantha Renfro, Ashley Rhinehart, Cindy Saylor

GCDD recognized a group of advocates who worked to make sure that no caps were placed on the Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) and that funds were allocated for 46 additional individuals to receive services.



Cindy Saylor

ADVOCATES STOP ICWP CAPS

KILEY HAYS The love and support Kiley Hays of Pelham received during and after her recovery from a gun shot wound has inspired her to help other people with disabilities through advocacy.

Hays became paralyzed and had to depend on others for her care at age 14. "I was no longer able to stand, walk, scream, sneeze, feed myself or hold the phone," she remembered.

Though new at advocacy, Hays stepped up and publicly testified what a funding cap in the ICWP would mean to her. "Without the ICWP Waiver the only other alternative would be to place me into a nursing home. I'm 25 years old, fully capable of talking, thinking and being myself. I just can't move my arms and legs, and a nursing home is not a place I need to be."

The waiver is helping Hays accomplish her life goals, one of which is to complete her degree in children's psychology from Thomas University.

EDWIN MCWILLIAMS Edwin McWilliams of Macon lives an abundant life that includes church, a part time job and classes at Macon State College. When he discovered legislators were planning to put a cap on the ICWP, he knew he had to act.

McWilliams, who was paralyzed in a car accident, held a pointer in his mouth to type hundreds of letters to Georgia legislators, urging them not to cap the ICWP.

"All I did was mail out lots of letters, go to the Capitol numerous times and speak to many politicians, but I did it because I had to - my quality of life depended on it," he said.

ANDREENA PATTON Andreena Patton's personal challenges after an automobile accident left her paralyzed has inspired her to become an advocate for herself and others in 1997.

"Having gone through what I've been through over the years to maintain my independence and seeing what others have experienced, I want to become more involved in policy-making," Patton said. "I believe that if the policymakers would actually take the time to see what individual disability cases are going through - see what they actually need, that they would make different decisions.

"I find that educating people and generating awareness about the needs of people with disabilities is one of the most important things we need to do."

ASHLEY RHINEHART Since childhood, Ashley Rhinehart, who was born with spinal muscular atrophy, has had to use a wheelchair and fight for her rights. Now at 32,

Advocates Stop ICWP Caps cont.

Rhinehart is a pro at standing up for herself and others with disabilities.

"As an advocate and user of the (ICWP) waiver, I have personally seen that health-wise, people are much better off living in the community than in a nursing home because of the level of care received," she revealed.

Having lived in her community her whole life with support from family and friends, Rhinehart realizes its importance. "It is always the most favorable situation that people with disabilities live in their own homes or with family members," she said.

CINDY SAYLOR After a car accident that left her father dead and her brother with a severe brain injury, Cindy Saylor had to overcome shyness to become an advocate for her brother.

Saylor's brother, Craig, is a recipient of the ICWP, and the proposed cap would have meant he would have lost services, if Saylor had not advocated for him.

"He now can continue to receive his behavioral management and help prepare his meals, go bowling, visit his family, his children and have choices, while still receiving the care he needs," she said.

SAMANTHA RENFRO Love for her daughter who has a traumatic brain injury has spurred Samantha Renfro to become a vocal advocate over the past 25 years.

"I want to give back and help others to receive the benefits my daughter has received, which are a quality of life and the dignity they deserve.

"I want to reiterate that it's important for the governor and legislature to understand how important it is for individuals to have access to these waivers... if they put a cap on them, a number of people won't be able to get out of institutions because they can't get a caregiver," Renfro said.

GREG HARRY Greg Harry became paralyzed after a fall in 1991, but through the ICWP lives a rich, full life with his wife and his music.

"When I understood the state was trying to put a cap on the Independent Care Waiver Program, I volunteered," Harry said. He went to the Georgia House to testify to the Appropriations Committee.

"I told them how the ICWP has helped me and without it my life would be worse. I'm one of the program's higher-end clients because I'm totally dependent. I would hope that the waiver program continues so I can do things that fulfill me in life."

Contributing writers Empish Thomas, Audrey Arthur and Norma Stanley

"We often forget to thank the many people with disabilities who travel from across the state and spend countless hours away from home to do the work that is needed to create change in our state. These efforts include organizing people in local communities, meeting with local and state officials to discuss the need for more services or coming to Atlanta when the General Assembly meets.

"We often forget to thank the many people with disabilities who travel from across the state and spend countless hours away from home to do the work that is needed to create change in our state."

Without these tireless efforts, we would not have experienced the successes that we have witnessed over the last few years," explained Dottie Adams, advocacy director for GCDD.

"These seven individuals spoke at the press conference on the ICWP and testified before several committees. They told their own story or those of their family members. They did not just complain about what was being proposed, they also provided ideas and solutions for how to address the problem," Adams said.



C. Anthony Cunningham Council Member of the Year Award

Lynnette Bragg

The C. Anthony Cunningham Award recognizes

a member of GCDD who has provided outstanding contributions during the year. The award was named after former chairperson Carl Cunningham who exhibited all the positive traits of leadership. He recognized that we need to continually build and support the future leaders of this movement. For all of that Carl stood for and did during his short period of time with us, GCDD recognizes one of our own leaders who embodies the spirit that Carl brought to us.

Incoming GCDD Chairperson Tom Seegmueller explained why outgoing Chairperson Lynnette Bragg earned the award. "Since 1999, Lynnette has put her heart and soul into GCDD and to making sure that people with developmental disabilities and their families have a voice and are heard by policymakers." ●

Katrina Devastates People with Disabilities and National Resources

The nation's largest disability rights activist group, ADAPT, held a press conference in Washington, D.C. September 19 to highlight problems people with disabilities are facing as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

People with disabilities, comprise 20% of the general population and 25%-30% of those affected by Hurricane Katrina, according to the U.S. Census. Many of those who survived remain uncounted and unregistered with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) because they were shipped to nursing homes, hospitals and other institutions all over the country where there are no FEMA Super Centers. Katrina exposed the lack of experience of FEMA and the Red Cross in dealing with the needs of people with disabilities in disaster situations.



"We understand why people with disabilities were evacuated without their wheelchairs, service animals and caretakers," said Mark Johnson, ADAPT organizer in Georgia. "But now that we are past that first response, FEMA and the Red Cross need to work with the disability community to assure that the needs of people with disabilities are met comprehensively, and that they don't languish in those institutional settings for years to come. The first order of business is an accounting of where all the people with disabilities ended up, and

what their needs are now."

In an effort to assist the thousands of people left homeless in the wake of Katrina, low income and HUD subsidized housing has been made immediately available. Ironically, thousands of poor people with disabilities have been waiting for up to 10 years for accessible, affordable housing. There is promising legislation in Congress to provide Medicaid Waivers for people with disabilities affected by Katrina. If passed, that legislation would help address the return to community for those people who were sent to institutional settings, but it is not known whether those waiver slots would reduce the number of slots available in individual states. Again, people with disabilities across the country have been waiting for those slots – some for many years.

Stephanie Thomas, National ADAPT organizer, said, "The whole disability services and supports system needs fixing, for Katrina survivors and for all Americans with disabilities."

Hurricane Katrina: How You Can Help

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Centers for Independent Living in Hattiesburg and Jackson, Miss., and Shreveport and Baton Rouge, La., have identified need for the following:

adult diapers • underpads for beds & chairs • liquid nutrition • wheelchairs • hospital beds • catheters • other medical items

For those who wish to help, donation centers are set up at the following drop off locations around metro Atlanta:

- Sweetwater Valley Camp, Austell
770-819-0662
- Freedom Medical, Fayetteville
678-817-7281
- Bomber Battery, Marietta
770-422-3111
- Friends of Disabled Adults and Children,
www.fodac.org, Stone Mountain
770-491-9014

June Kaile, a disability policy consultant with a special interest in disaster preparedness, urges people do the following to help evacuees:

1. Let people in need know they should apply for assistance through FEMA and identify their disability.

- 1-800-621-FEMA
- 1-800-462-7585 TDD/TTY
- www.fema.gov/register.shtm

2. Send a message and/or card to independent living centers and other disability rights groups in affected areas. If offering money, items or time, be specific.

3. Coordinate your efforts at all levels.

FEDERAL LEVEL Interagency Coordinating Council on Emergency Preparedness and Individuals with Disabilities,
www.dhs.gov/disabilitypreparedness.html

ALABAMA

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334-353-4663
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Governor's Office of Disability Affairs
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MISSISSIPPI

LIFE of Mississippi, Inc.
601-969-4009 • lifefms@aol.com

TEXAS

Houston Center for Independent Living
713-974-4621 Voice/TTY • 713-569-4086
www.coalitionforbarrierfreeliving.com



4. Help build disability-specific web sites, for example:

- www.katrina-la.net
- www.katrinadisability.info

5. Offer to provide housing, transportation, food, personal items, etc. for people with disabilities.

- www.katrina-la.net
- www.katrinadisability.info

6. Offer equipment & supplies

www.fodac.org, Paul Timmons, 843-817-2651, presslord@aol.com

7. Volunteer to assist, register at:

- www.katrinadisability.info
- <https://volunteer.ccrf.hhs.gov/>

8. Support disability-specific funds, for example:

- ARC, www.thearc.org
- Autism, www.talkautism.com
- Easter Seals, www.easterseals.com
- National Down Syndrome, www.ndss.org
- NCIL, www.ncil.org
- Spina Bifida, www.sbaa.org
- TASH, www.tash.org/
- UCP, Houston, www.ucphouston.org

Accessible Housing Project to Be Replicated

A successful program that has resulted in more than 350 fully accessible new homes in Georgia will now be put into practice in three other states: West Virginia, New Hampshire and Texas.

The EasyLiving Home program encourages homebuilders to build homes that are accessible to people with disabilities. The program then inspects the homes and certifies them as "EasyLiving." To pass this inspection, the home must have:

- Step-free entrance to the central living area of a home
- Broader doorways
- A bedroom, entertainment area, kitchen and a full bathroom with sufficient maneuvering space for a wheelchair on the main floor

At a recent Replication Summit September 10 - 12 for Texans who are planning to implement the program, the group took a tour of several accessible homes in Snellville and Canton, Ga., that were built by Wendt Builders, Inc., and Oakwood Homes, L.L.C., just two builders in metro Atlanta who are committed to building accessible homes. Builders across the state, from Cordele to Canton, are realizing the value of the program.

"The program allows basic access for everyone," explained Mettina van der Veen, program and replication project director for EasyLiving Home. "A lot of active adults and empty nesters are looking to buy their last house. An EasyLiving Home allows them to age in place," she said.

Once another state adopts the program, EasyLiving Home representatives provide technical support and remain in contact to assure the integrity of the program, though van der Veen said, "I have no doubt this will happen."

Laurie Gerken Redd, administrative director of the Independent Living Research Utilization of The Institute for Rehabilitation and Resource thought the tour was informative.

"It was wonderful. We got to see first hand what builders were doing, and we got to talk to them and find out what their mindset is. We learned how to market to builders. It was great training," Gerken Redd said.

As the program's popularity spreads across the country, van der Veen has big plans. "I hope eventually to compile a national database of EasyLiving Homes across the U.S. that realtors can tap into. I really think we can get to that point," she said.



The success of the program in Georgia is a testament to the market-ability of the standards. "Last year we had about 100 certified homes. Now we have more than 350, and we hope to have 500 early next year, if not sooner," van der Veen said.

Advocates Demand Full Participation

More than 2,000 Americans with developmental disabilities, their family members and the people who work alongside them came from all over the country to attend the Alliance for Full Participation's 2005 Summit in September. Participants concluded the meeting with one vision:

We want dignity and respect for all. We want full participation for all.

- We want to be included in all communities and have all the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship. We need to be safe and free at the same time.
- We belong in schools, neighborhoods, businesses, government, churches, synagogues and mosques.
- We do not belong in segregated institutions, sheltered workshops, special schools or nursing homes. Those places must close, to be replaced by homes in regular neighborhoods and schools that have the tools they need to include us.
- We can work in worthwhile jobs. We know how to help each other do this. It is being done in some places, just not all places. We hope to work alongside other Americans.

The leaders at the Summit believe



the following must happen to make our vision a reality:

- We want to see a plan to close public and private institutions over the next few years, and people with disabilities helped to live in communities, in regular houses and neighborhoods. We expect all states to stop placing children in institutions and segregated residential schools.
- People want real jobs with real pay, real businesses and volunteer opportunities, not sheltered workshops and day programs.
- Families with children with disabilities need support to have equal access to full and rich lives. Having a child (or adult child) with a disability must not force a family into poverty or constant worry. While some have support to lead decent lives, others do not and are isolated and feel abandoned by America. Everyone who needs it must get the support they need.
- People with disabilities must be part of all planning, governance, leadership and implementation of the programs that affect us.
- The term mental retardation has become hurtful. Words hurt and labels limit human potential.
- Public funds expended on behalf of people with developmental disabilities must be under their control and direction or, for children and others who need it, their families and trusted friends.
- People who have chosen to work with people with developmental disabilities should be paid a decent wage with benefits; they should not have to work two or three jobs to support their families. This is important work that must be respected.
- Medicaid is the vital lifeline for people with developmental disabilities. Medicaid reform must protect access to this program, promote inclusion for people in their communities and empower citizens to control the funds spent on their behalf.
- Inclusive communities are part of the solution. Inclusive communities support all people, and make limited public funds go farther.
- We must understand and honor diversity and include all people in planning, governing and participating in communities.
- Poverty limits human potential. Jobs and opportunities to start businesses, build assets and be a part of communities, help all Americans.
- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are often pitted against people with other disabilities in politics at all levels. We want to work toward the same ends as other people with disabilities. We welcome positive coalitions with others. ●

Self-Advocate Recounts Civil Rights Experience

By Shannon Barnes

I was so excited to be chosen to make a speech at the Alliance for Full Participation Summit 2005 and take an important trip like this. I felt so honored, and I had an immediate feeling that this will lead me to an extremely bright and important future very soon.

(Job Coach Nancy Brooks-Lane and I) got on the plane right on time and off we went to our nation's capital. When we landed in D.C., I was bouncy and excited. When we went out walking, I really loved the sites.

D.C. is cool, but not my kind of place to live. I was bombarded with all the sights, noise, crowds and commotion. So we headed back to our hotel and relaxed with some music. The music was special because it was me singing. After I performed the music for Nancy, I rehearsed my speech before going to bed. Perfect. I was good to go.



The next morning, we headed to the conference. It was a huge civil rights convention for people with developmental disabilities. We heard many speakers including Martin Luther King III. He is awesome, just like his father, and his views are pretty much the same as mine.

At 3 PM, it was mine and Nancy's turn to do our presentation, called *Pushing the Employment Agenda: Making Community*

Jobs A Reality. We were part of a panel of five people: Dr. John Butterworth from the Institute of Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts; Mary Strehlow and Joanne O'Neill from Washington State and Nancy and I from the Cobb-Douglas Community Services Board. It went very smooth. I spoke so well with the help of my computer, and people listened and responded with great discussions.

It is wonderful to be a part of the civil rights movement. This is part of my speech: My goal of this trip is to of course have fun, but also create better attitudes toward people with disabilities, and I want to see more opportunities for education, employment and community inclusion.

The importance of support, job training, higher education opportunities and a chance for skilled and advanced career positions means the world to me and people like me. Having the chance to get official training and support is a big difference from sitting at home day in, day out, feeling bad. To have a career that I have always wanted and having the feeling and knowledge that I am needed and valued has meant the world to me.

I have autism and am proud to be unique and another part of diversity. We don't need fixing or curing because there is nothing wrong with us. We are just a different group of people. A group that needs to be embraced, included and accepted as a full part of the great diversity of mankind.

Everyone is handicapped. Everybody has weak spots. It makes no sense to act like everyone is the same skill level. It also makes no sense to discriminate against people with disabilities; anyone on this earth can acquire disabilities – whether they are mental, physical or both. It is not bad or terrible, or good and easy. It's just a part of life. ●

FINDING JOBS:

By Valerie Smith Buxton
and Christina Rosell

Disability Employment in Georgia and Beyond

Imagine a place where people with disabilities who can work, must work. Where day habilitation programs are no longer an option, and the use of employment and day program funds for working age adults are primarily used to establish employment supports.

This scenario is more than a daydream. For the people of Washington State, it will become the reality July 1, 2006. And the disability community in Georgia is watching the process carefully.

David Mank, director of the Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University, helped Washington create this revolutionary new policy.

"People will need to be employed or engaged in activities clearly intended to end in employment," Mank said.

"Every county in the state is moving fast to deal with this."

Washington has always been ahead of the curve on employment for people with disabilities, hosting annual meetings on the topic. About one-third of the attendees are people with disabilities or their families. "Their view is that just because someone has a developmental disability doesn't mean he shouldn't work," he said.

While not all counties are 100% ready, Mank said he knows of at least five that have already phased out segregated day programs. Other counties have made significant progress, but are

asking, "How do we get the last 30% of our consumers in a job or on a pathway to a job?" Mank said.

Unlike Georgia, Washington's long history of helping people with disabilities find work has left most counties with multiple providers of supported employment services, which will now help counties identify jobs.

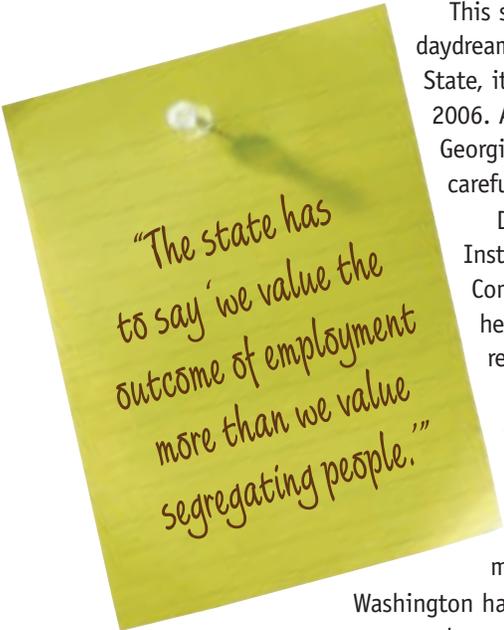
"Seattle is doing a good job of getting jobs for people with disabilities in corporations," Mank said. "The wages of people in supported employment in Seattle are double that of other areas."

Only a very few exceptions are allowed under this process. "Everyone is expected to work, with the exception of people with serious continuous health care issues and people who are dangerous to themselves or others," Mank said. Even people with significant cognitive or physical disabilities will be able to find jobs.

"Everyone is expected to work, with the exception of people with serious continuous health care issues and people who are dangerous to themselves or others..."

Mank described one man with significant cognitive disabilities who now has a successful document shredding business. "He doesn't communicate with words and sometimes has behavioral issues. He has support 100% of the time," Mank said. The support allows him to interact with his clients, many of whom are located in the same county building.

So why is Washington the only state in the country that is this far along in the disability employment arena? Mank said the state has had sustained state and local leadership for more than 20 years, and it continually looks for and grooms new leaders. "Someone has to say employment is



"The state has to say 'we value the outcome of employment more than we value segregating people.'"



important and put money behind it," he said.

Mank has advice for other states, such as Georgia who want to move toward a similar model of service delivery. "As long as the state pays a service provider the same amount of money to put someone in a segregated workshop as they do for supported employment, it won't change. The state has to say 'we value the outcome of employment more than we value segregating people,'" he said.

Georgia is taking the first step toward implementing similar employment policies. "The 'Employment First' initiative says that for adults with developmental disabilities, the primary choice should be employment," Mank said. Disability advocates from the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Georgia Advocacy Office and the Institute on Human Development and Disability are discussing how to improve employment options for people with disabilities in Georgia.

"First, they need to concentrate on getting jobs to everyone who wants one. Then they have to make it worth the money – service providers would get less money for segregated settings than for finding jobs," Mank said. The leadership also has to find ways to overcome funding sources that prohibit integrated employment outcomes. Mank has high hopes for the success of a better employment policy. "The leadership is organized in the state of Georgia, and there's a core of excitement there," he said.

Georgia Employment Options Today

While Georgia has some cutting edge programs in effect, it is also behind in some areas, according to Joy Eason Hopkins, president of Selective Alternatives. "The reason we're not seeing growth



Cylinda NeSmith-Mahari, left, shares her love of making children's clothing with employee Takeiya Bell, right.

Woman Sews Up Bright Future

Unlike other clients, Takeiya Bell knew exactly what kind of job she wanted when she first met her job coach, Ella Scott, at the Cobb-Douglas Community Services Board.

"Normally I have to find out what clients like and what their goals are. Takeiya had designed some clothes, and she brought me her drawings. She wanted to be a fashion designer," Scott said.

After several months of researching schools and visiting working designers, Scott found herself at Royalty Children's Wear in Marietta. After talking to owner Cylinda NeSmith-Mahiri, Scott knew she had a good employment match for Bell, who has a cognitive disability.

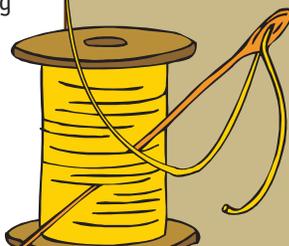
Royalty Children's Wear, a small specialty shop that designs, creates and sells custom children's clothing, was contracting out its embroidery projects. Scott negotiated a job for Bell, and in return, agreed that Bell would purchase and bring an embroidery machine to the shop. Bell is benefiting from her new job, and the shop is benefiting from the new machine. If Bell leaves her job, she can take her embroidery machine with her.

"It was a good starting point for Takeiya. She's getting all this sewing experience," Scott said.

After four months of employment, both Bell and NeSmith-Mahiri are happy with the relationship. "Cylinda is a good person to work with because she has patience. Even if I mess up, she doesn't get mad," Bell said. "One time she let me try to sew a quilt. I told my fiancé what I did. I was so proud."

NeSmith-Mahiri said working with Bell has been a good experience. "Takeiya doesn't cover up anything if she makes a mistake or doesn't understand. She lets me know, and we can fix it and move on. She picks up on things pretty easily. When someone has a genuine interest, you want to make sure they get it," she said. "She sees a need and fills it the best she can. She shows me she's interested in what we're trying to accomplish."

Bell, who works on the embroidery machine, said, "My favorite thing to do is put the order into the machine. When it comes out right, it motivates me to go on. Every time I see a new outfit, it fills my heartbeat with a lot of joy." ●



Competitive Employment: One Option for People with Disabilities

Pam Fordham is straightforward, no-nonsense, ambitious and has a visual impairment. She hasn't allowed her disability to become a barrier and has always worked in jobs she found by going through the same channels as people without disabilities.

Currently a Financial Service Representative for a SunTrust Bank in metro Atlanta, Fordham works in a small branch office, which also requires her to perform teller tasks.

"Everyone's been really accommodating," Fordham said. "They have a really good policy as far as diversity. I asked for a 21-inch monitor, and they gave us two immediately."

But in the past, she has run into problems. "If I made mistakes, people would think it was from my blindness," she said. She also dealt with condescending attitudes. These issues convinced her to tackle the problem head on, and she has been teaching disability awareness workshops for years since.

"I hit attitudes head on. I'm straightforward about how I want to be treated," she said.

"I hit attitudes head on. I'm straightforward about how I want to be treated."

One problem she encounters is transportation when she has to go to downtown Atlanta for training or meetings. "I still get lost in the Five Points MARTA station," she laughed. But she has overcome that issue by having the Downtown Atlanta Ambassador Force meet her at her train. "I know how to ask for assistance without sounding negative."

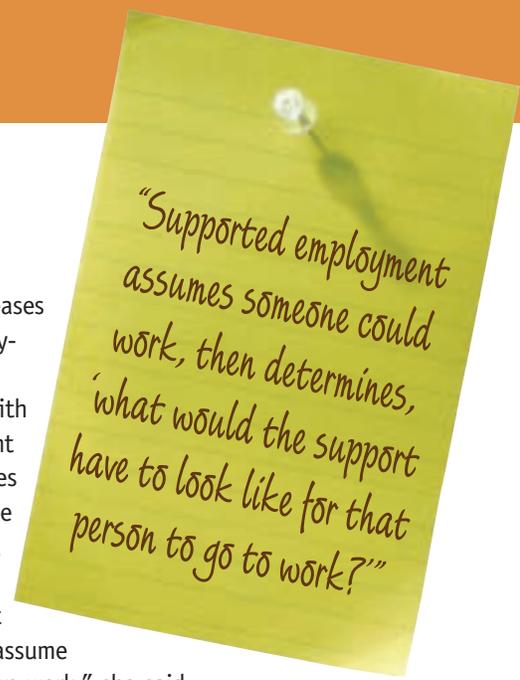
Fordham also runs her own company, Professional Artists Management, but took the job at SunTrust in March after adopting three children. "At first people were worried about how I would do. I was slow. It was hard to see licenses and checks. It has been difficult," she admitted. But with some help from managers, Fordham has been doing fine and has even prevented two potential fraud issues.

Her advice to others with disabilities about employment is simple: "Push to do whatever you have to, to follow your dream. It certainly has paid off for me," she said. ●



Pam Fordham runs an artist management company, in addition to her job at SunTrust.

and increases of employment for people with significant disabilities is because we're not yet to the point that we assume people can work," she said.



"Supported employment assumes someone could work, then determines, what would the support have to look like for that person to go to work?"

Currently, some service provider programs screen people with disabilities to determine what they cannot do, instead of what they can do, Hopkins said. During the evaluation process, the people with disabilities are left waiting for work. Some are sent to day habilitation programs, sheltered workshops or home until a job becomes available.

"If we assumed people could work, we would save a lot of money in this state. We could figure out specifically what each person needs to go to work and do that," Hopkins said.

One way for Georgians with disabilities to find jobs is to start at a Department of Labor One-Stop or Career Center or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

People with disabilities who look for jobs through the state's program must first be determined to be eligible; undergo an evaluation and assessment process; have an individualized employment plan developed for them; and, have

"Service providers make more money providing other kinds of services. They make more money if they send people to a workshop. That presents a problem."

support team members and services requested before a job is matched to them. Some people are deemed ineligible to receive vocational services after extensive testing because their disabilities are so significant. In those cases, the people are referred to other state programs for services.

Those who use the state's system also have access to services that support the goals in their

Individualized Employment Plan (IEP), such as counseling, transportation services, work adjustment training, on-the-job training, supported employment, job coaching, assistive technology, work readiness training, college/university instruction, vocational/technical training, school-to-work transitioning, physical and mental restoration services and other services and supports as needed.

While the state is offering more employment supports and has begun to fund new types of employment opportunities, Hopkins feels many state-funded programs haven't changed much since supported employment became an option in 1986.

"Service providers make more money providing other kinds of services. They make more money if they send people to a workshop. That presents a problem," she said.

But, she has hope and faith in the new leadership at the state level. "I remain optimistic and hopeful I will see that change in my lifetime."

For people who are really eager to work, Hopkins said they might consider calling their Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Disease regional board office directly. The regional board can direct them to an agency. The problem: "The agency may or may not be able to provide services," she said. Instead, the person may be placed on a waiting list until services become available.

Hopkins pointed out the best agency to use would be one that only provides supported employment services. Because the agency's only function is finding jobs and supporting people with disabilities in those jobs, people don't get moved to other day programs.

"Supported employment assumes someone could work, then determines, 'what would the support have to look like for that person to go to work?'" Hopkins said.

Georgia is also host to an innovative work program called customized employment. In this type of program, a team spends a lot of time with the person with a disability to identify his likes, dislikes and dreams. Once the person's preferences are known, the team may suggest:



Glen Friedman performed administrative tasks in preparation for upcoming interviews.

"I hope I will eventually get to work more days a week."

Bingo! Everything Lines Up for a Great Job

A few years ago, Cynthia Kelley, a job coach from the Institute on Human Development and Disability, worked with Glen Friedman, who has a cognitive disability, to find a job for him in Athens, Ga. Soon he began performing administrative work at a Jewish synagogue a few days a week.

Unfortunately, he became ill last January and was no longer able to work. He was treated for a lung condition, and the doctor declared that Friedman shouldn't live alone anymore, but in a primary care home. Friedman then moved to a primary care home in Atlanta and decided it was time to find a job again.



His old job coach began assisting him in another job search, this time in Atlanta. Kelley visited prospective job sites to find out what duties he could perform there. Then, once a prospect's interest was piqued, Friedman visited the job site for an interview. It was almost eight months before he found a job.

"I was a little frustrated, but I didn't let it bother me because I knew something would come along eventually," Friedman said.

On August 20, Friedman began his job at EdenBrook Nursing Home in Dunwoody. He works for the activities coordinator, playing bingo, doing arts and crafts, and running other activities for the residents.

"I love it and they love me," he smiled. "I hope I will eventually get to work more days a week."

Friedman volunteers at disABILITY LINK, a disability advocacy center, on his days off, helping with mailings and other jobs that needed to be done. ●

Learning Curve

Fred Matthews has worked for Benson Printing in Cherokee County for over three months now. He enjoys collating and assembling pamphlets, folders and handouts for meetings and conventions. Matthews found the job with the help of Burnt Mountain Center, a private nonprofit service provider in Pickens County.

This isn't the first job the center has helped Matthews find, though. In the last 20 years, Mike Wofford, director, and the others at the center have formed relationships with him, learning his likes, preferences and abilities. Accordingly, they match Matthews with companies where he will work well and like his job. Over time, as his preferences change, he tries new jobs.

"It's been a progressive thing," said Wofford. "He's had lots of jobs. He's been laid off... he's quit jobs. He's had jobs he loved and jobs he hated."

Matthews' job history has been a learning experience. After he worked in a cryogenics plant, he wasn't satisfied because he didn't have interaction with the outside world. From that job, the people at the center learned that he likes to work in integrated settings with people who don't have disabilities. From other jobs including fast food restaurants, a paper-recycling plant and a hospital cafeteria, Wofford learned that Matthews likes cleanliness and doesn't work well in chaotic situations.

"He came out as a person the first time he went into a real job."

Wofford said that working has improved Matthews life. "He is a different and changed person today," he said. "He came out as a person the first time he went into a real job."

With autism tendencies and moderate cognitive disabilities, Matthews couldn't speak until he was around 10 years of age. According to Wofford, he had very poor social skills, performed self-injurious behavior and couldn't initiate taking food for himself unless someone told him to. Now, he is extremely likable, social and productive and even talks of becoming a spokesperson for people with cognitive disabilities one day. ●



Fred Matthews assembles materials for an upcoming conference.

Matthews said that his job at Benson Printing is his favorite job and he enjoys socializing with fellow employees as well as performing the tasks at hand.

- ✔ **Job Carving** – the team creates a job with input from the client and the employer.
- ✔ **Resource Ownership** – as an added incentive to employment, the client brings a piece of equipment that would help the employer increase business.
- ✔ **Business Within A Business** – the client starts a business that operates within an existing business.
- ✔ **Microenterprise Development** – the client starts his own small business.

The customized employment program, piloted by Cobb-Douglas Community Services Board (Cobb CSB), was funded by a five-year grant. As the program goes into its fifth year, the funding has dropped to 60% of the original amount, and the focus is on finding new sources of funding so the successful program continues when the grant ends.

To do this, a number of organizations have come together to help people with disabilities meet their employment goals: Cobb CSB, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), CobbWorks! Inc., The Cobb Workforce Development Center (a state One-Stop Career Center), the Cobb Microenterprise Center, the Small Business Development Center and Score, Inc. (Senior Corps of Retired Executives).

Kate Brady is the Project Exceed coordinator for Cobb CSB. "Project Exceed serves folks who are not successful in other work programs," Brady explained. A goal of the project is to move funding more toward individual training accounts (ITA) to support customized employment goals and give consumers more control over how the money is spent.

Through the relationships built with other organizations, Project Exceed has opened up some new funding sources for people with disabilities who want to start a business within a business or their own small business.

"We spoke with the Cobb Microenterprise Center who already had in its mission to help people who wouldn't have access to entrepreneurship," Brady said.

The Cobb Microenterprise Center offers a 12-week business plan writing class and opened up some slots for people with disabilities. "Twice a week students walk through the process of writing a business plan," Brady said. The class also



provides good networking opportunities with business support professionals, such as lawyers, accountants and marketing specialists. If needed, Project Exceed provides a job coach to attend the class with the client.

A sound business plan is key to obtaining funding, and through this class, or through input from Score or the Small Business Development Center, a solid plan is developed.

"The Microenterprise Center has some funding resources," Brady said. The center offers a two-to-one matching plan. If a client saves \$500 toward their new business, the center will provide \$1000. "That's some of the funding we tap into."

Upon completion of a business plan, students may be able to access VR money, and through a bid process (instead of choosing from a list of

"Some parents haven't had the expectation that their child would work. We talk to parents to save money for their transitioning students. It's like paying for a college degree."

approved providers), hire the supports they need to implement their business plan. "VR has collaboratively funded a lot of these businesses. Their contribution is very powerful," Brady commented. Banks are also approached, but because many clients don't have an employment history, they plan to go to the bank after the business has been operating successfully for a period of time.

Other funding sources Project Exceed is looking into include the client's family. "Some parents haven't had the expectation that their child would work. We talk to parents to save money for their transitioning students. It's like paying for a college degree," Brady said.

Community partnerships have also been successful. In one case, a school wanted to hire a woman who could speak Spanish as a para-professional, but the school didn't have money to pay her, so it turned to its Partner in Education, that helped raise the money to fund the position.

Even Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) are being considered as possible funding sources. "People on Medicaid, SSI and SSDI often have to

keep their earnings and savings limited to keep benefits. They can get rid of money in their account and use it as an employment resource," she said. "Medicaid can pay for day support. This money could feasibly go to customized employment instead," Brady said.

With such diverse employment resources available, how do people with disabilities find the right resource to fit their needs? Turning to a peer supporter can help. Georgia has more than 100 peer supporters who have disabilities and draw on their own successes to help others with a variety of life issues.

In the employment arena, peer supporters have expertise in helping clients develop interview skills, find job resources and keep benefits intact (see article, page 27), while offering emotional support.

"It helps to have peer support in employment. Going into a work environment is really scary because of accommodations issues," said Hilary Elliott, an Independent Living Program Manager at disABILITY LINK and certified peer supporter.

"Employment for people with disabilities is not the norm, so it's really important to talk with someone with disabilities who is employed."

When a peer supporter is requested, every attempt is made to find one with a similar, if not the same, disability, who can really understand. "I have MS (multiple sclerosis), and other people with MS always ask me how I deal with fatigue in the work place," Elliott explained.

The Georgia Peer Support Project has trained and certified more than 100 peer supporters across Georgia and has been working to convince Medicaid and Medicare to pay peer supporters.

Linda Pogue, also of disABILITY LINK, provides coordination and administration for the project and hopes that soon, "Everyone will see how worthwhile it is," she said.

People with disabilities who are interested in peer support, should contact their local independent living centers. ●

"It helps to have peer support in employment. Going into a work environment is really scary because of accommodations issues."

PERSPECTIVE

Mia Gets a Job

By Patricia Nobbie, D.P.A.

Mia's Mom and Deputy Director, Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

Mia is 20 years old and graduated from high school last May, without a job, without even prospects of a job, without being determined, "ready to work." How did we get in this position? Unfortunately, it is fairly easy, even for a well-informed parent.

We live in a district that has a lot of things in place to help kids transition from school to work. It has a transition specialist and a community-based instruction program that allows kids to try out a variety of job settings in the community with job coaching and transportation. High school Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings focus on transition, and the district uses a comprehensive checklist for parents to assess what their teen needs to accomplish to get ready for life after high school. The district co-funds a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor to assist students and

convenes a multi-agency council to solve the issues around transition one student at a time.

Also, our family had a lot in place. I convene a statewide transition steering committee, serve on the State Advisory Panel for special education and oversee a federal labor grant that is developing cutting edge practices for employing people with disabilities. Mia teaches Sunday school, managed varsity volleyball for three years, occasionally helps at the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) offices, keeps track of all our appointments on the kitchen calendar and has great organizational skills, as evidenced by the only folded sock drawer in the family. Mia also had only one job objective in high school – to be a hostess at her favorite restaurant.

Mia went through four community-based instructional placements her junior year. None were related to her job goal in that they didn't teach her the specific skills she needed to be a hostess. One was in a restaurant kitchen, but she hated this job, and before she got fired she made everybody

miserable with her resistance. Her most successful placement was at a federal office where she filed, shredded and did messenger activities. At the IEP meeting at the end of that school year, Mia reiterated that she wanted to be a hostess. I asked the team to try to work that out. I hoped she would be working part time by spring.

In the fall however, we were notified that her first job assignment was unpacking boxes at a local discount clothing store. I didn't want her to spend time on another job that wasn't related to her job goal, as it was her senior year. So I asked for options. I was told Mia could sign up for VR services, begin the evaluation process, and in spring, go through "work adjustment," possibly be employed before school got out, and be ready to go with support from VR. This was my stated job goal – that she be working before school got out, so we would have a seamless transition.

I requested a discovery-type evaluation from an agency that contracts with VR. I wanted someone to spend time with Mia, learning her strengths and weaknesses, what she wanted to do and what skills she possessed that we could build on toward being a hostess. They spent about 30 hours with her, but mostly in a classroom and in the agency – not at camp, volleyball practice or Sunday school. They did lots of testing; some was repetitive. The evaluation process took months. We didn't sit down to discuss the results as a team until February. After a two-hour

"Mia also had one job objective the entire time she was in high school – to be a hostess at her favorite restaurant."

meeting, we had nothing. The evaluation classified her in a "pre-employment" stage, which meant VR would not pay for supported employment until Mia provided "evidence" that she was "ready to work." We had to reconvene in a few months. I promised to get her some work-related experience in that time period.

For the next two months, Mia worked at our church setting up tables for Wednesday night dinners



Mia (left) and Pat Nobbie have overcome several barriers to employment.

Transitioning Student Overcomes Employment Barriers

“To my amazement, I was facing the worst-case scenario that every parent dreads. Mia would be graduating to sit at home and watch TV!”

for 60-80 people, with great success, and very little supervision. I was encouraged that she could learn to do the job she wanted. At the second IEP, we still could not resolve the issues. If I kept her in high school another year, they could not guarantee that they could provide an individual job coach, even if I got her a job. The district could not provide individual transportation either. She'd have to be on the schedule with community-based instruction kids. VR would not provide supported employment because they did not consider her ready to work. She was on the short-term list for day support in the adult service system, and on the list for state-funded support with a local agency, but no slot was imminent. To my amazement, I was facing the worst-case scenario that every parent dreads. Mia would be graduating to sit at home and watch TV!

We fell back on our own community resources. The chef for church dinners was the head chef at an area hotel. He knew Mia's job goal. He arranged for us to meet with human resources. They treated her like anyone else and met with me, saying they were willing to figure out how to include her in the banquet support staff, but they wanted a coach.

We went back to education since she was still eligible for services, and asked for another IEP meeting. The district said they would provide a coach. They then met with the hotel staff and the head chef and worked on a schedule. We are now waiting to get the coach on board, who will shadow the job and determine what Mia needs to learn.

So maybe by press time, Mia will actually be working, setting up rooms for banquets and meetings. It is not exactly what she wants to do, but the hotel staff knows she wants to be a hostess, so maybe she can work up to that. We know she has to work on her stamina and meet and greet skills. She will have to adapt to the hectic pace. I am scared to death sometimes, and then I remember that she has often risen to the demand if she's into it. If she does OK on the job, learns to take on more responsibility, then VR will take that as “evidence of being ready to work” and will offer supported employment services.

We will not really achieve successful post-school

outcomes for teens with disabilities until we figure out how to place them in jobs they are interested in, train them to do those jobs and build adequate supports. In my case, business was NOT the barrier. The barriers were systems that didn't work together, irrelevant policies to prove readiness to work, lack of individualization as exit from school approached and limited resources. Mia wants to work. Most people do. We have to make this process easier and successful for all kids. ●

Tips for Transitioning Students

1. **Get a job** before high school is out. If your teen has interests or ideas about working, explore them as early as you can.
2. Get the **IEP team to incorporate** those ideas in their transition plan. Build up to actually working.
3. **Network** with other parents. **Share** community connections.
4. **Explore** your natural connections in the community. **Help** your teen volunteer.
5. **Get VR and adult services involved** as early as you can.
6. **Talk to your district** about convening a multi-agency transition committee. If they're willing, there is **technical assistance** available.
7. **At age 18**, make sure you have signed up for **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** benefits if your teen is eligible, and that you have gone through **intake and assessment** for home and community-based services, because there is a long waiting list.

Employers Tap Into

By Valerie Smith Buxton

Disability Labor Market



Assistive technology helps employees with disabilities perform their jobs.

As aging baby boomers begin to retire and businesses continue to grow, many employers are hoping to take advantage of a vastly untapped employee market – people with disabilities.

“We’re going to have a real need going forward for a workforce that meets our growing needs in the next five – 10 years,” David Altman, vice president of corporate communication at Southern Company, said.

According to the National Organization on Disability and the Harris 2000 survey, only 32% of people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64 are working, while 81% of people without disabilities in the same range are working.

“This is an extraordinary market for us as an employer, and there’s an extraordinary need for people with disabilities to find jobs.”

“This is an extraordinary market for us as an employer, and there’s an extraordinary need for people with disabilities to find jobs,” Altman said.

Southern Company hopes to improve its disability diversity by starting with its existing employees, but even this can be difficult. “People have to self-identify that they have a disability,” said Senior Vice President of Human Resources Ellen Lindemann. “We are trying to create more awareness among our employee base. Many employees don’t seek the

accommodations they need because they feel uncomfortable coming forward about their disability. We need to know how to reach out in a legal and ethical way to people with disabilities.”

Currently, people with a range of physical disabilities, including employees who are visually or hearing impaired or who use wheelchairs are employed in a variety of job types. “People with disabilities at our company are not isolated in any type of job,” Lindemann, whose daughter has a disability, said. Because of privacy laws, the company does not know the number of people with disabilities it employs. The only way it knows is when an employee asks for an accommodation.

Southern Company has found that accommodating employees with disabilities has not been too difficult. The company has provided large screen monitors for people with visual impairments and parking spots and desk and shelf height modifications for people who use wheelchairs. Job coaches and extra training have been used to accommodate a few employees who have cognitive disabilities. In addition, when appropriate, the company has allowed people to work from home for certain periods if they had medical or travel issues.

“Expenses have been minimal compared to the return,” Lindemann said.

While corporate level employees are aware of the commitment the company has made to hiring more people with disabilities, it must communicate this commitment throughout the company, according to Altman. “The need is there for greater awareness among employees, especially at the hiring manager level,” Altman said. “We need to do a better job of communicating, with hiring managers, what people with disabilities can do. Managers have to know the company will be supportive and encouraging.”

The company also intends to further develop relationships with appropriate local, state, federal and private agencies to ensure it meets its goals of a diverse workforce. Southern Company has turned to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) division of the Department of Labor for accommodations advice,



HOME DEPOT DISABILITY INITIATIVES

and has hired some employees with cognitive disabilities through a supported employment agency.

Supported employment agencies help people with disabilities find jobs, then support them in those jobs. Some mainstream employment agencies are helping to employ people with disabilities as well, such as Pro Staff, who receives qualified job candidates with disabilities from supported employment agencies, VR and off the street.

Tim Smith, group vice president of the staffing firm in the metro-Atlanta area, treats people with disabilities the same as he would any minority group. "We have worked hard not just to employ people, but really understand what they can offer regardless of their disabilities," he said.

From time to time, he's met with resistance to the idea of hiring someone with a disability. "There's a fear attached to employing people who are different," Smith said. "So we go through education with our clients and show them how they can benefit from hiring someone with a disability. The majority of the time they agree."

Many fears surround the issue of accommodations, but Smith said this barrier is easily crossed. "Many companies already have something in place or Pro Staff will provide the accommodation. Sometimes the government provides assistive technology when it makes sense and some workers bring their own equipment," he said.

However, staffing firms must make sure they have a good grasp on the skills a job entails and ensure they offer someone who has those skills. "You can set a person with a disability up for failure without doing good discovery," he said.

If an employer is still nervous, Smith has even sent job candidates to work for free for a day or two as a working interview.

"It's not about being touchy feely; it's truly about placing the best person in the job," he said.

Altman said that while all kinds of employment barriers still exist, "Employers are removing barriers one job at a time. It starts with a commitment. The ability to make that happen determines who will be successful." ●

The Home Depot prides itself on recognizing people for their abilities, rather than their disabilities. As such, the company has always demonstrated a strong commitment to recruiting and providing employment opportunities for qualified individuals with disabilities and has created several key programs specifically targeting this segment of the population. Our disability initiatives rely heavily on partnerships with local vocational rehabilitation centers throughout the United States. Through the implementation of these programs, we have been able to hire more than 500 additional associates with disabilities.

Deaf-2-Work - This work adjustment program started in Atlanta to initially help deaf and hearing impaired individuals with limited employment experience get on-the-job experience. The program will expand in 2006 to provide opportunities in the Minnesota and possibly Florida.

Facility Support Associate - In 1998, the Facility Support Associate (FSA) position was created to provide employment opportunities in our stores for individuals with developmental disabilities. There are currently over 450 FSAs.

Ken's Kids - Ken's Kids is a privately funded, nonprofit corporation that offers vocational training to young adults who have developmental disabilities. Ken's Kids was founded in Philadelphia in 1998 by parents seeking employment opportunities for their young adults. Since their inception, Ken's Kids has trained and placed 80 young adults with cognitive disabilities in 34 Home Depot stores across Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and New York.

Olympic Job Opportunity Program - In May 1994, Home Depot announced its official sponsorship of the Paralympic Games. As part of this, we participate in the Olympic Job Opportunities Program (OJOP). These athletes work for Home Depot in a part-time capacity to accommodate their training requirements but are paid a full-time salary. Currently, Home Depot has 20 Paralympic Athletes working in our stores and four who are in the process of entering the program. ●



By Gloria Johnson-Going,
Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion,
The Home Depot

How Media Shapes

By Valerie Smith Buxton

the Image of Disability



Emmy Award-nominee Hugh Laurie plays Gregory House, a brilliant doctor with a disability, on Fox's medical drama, *House, M.D.*

A young woman lies in a nursing home, paralyzed, with one leg amputated because of negligent caretakers. To her, this is worse than dying, and she begs her friend to kill her.

This is the image of disability disseminated to millions of Americans who went to see the Academy Award-winning film, *Million Dollar Baby*.

On the flip side, another critically-acclaimed film, seen by fewer Americans, documents the lives of rugby athletes who use wheelchairs. *Murderball* shows people in wheelchairs as real people who swear, have sex, have relationships and live rich, full lives.

"I really didn't like *Million Dollar Baby*," said Beth Haller, Ph.D., associate professor of journalism in the Department of Mass Communication at Towson University in Maryland.

"The media is where people learn about disability, and it needs to be done well," she said. "Disability was portrayed as a fate worse than death. It was very destructive and fed people's fears. Disability is something that could happen to everyone, and the audience doesn't want to be faced with that."

"The media is where people learn about disability, and it needs to be done well..."

But Haller, who is the co-editor of Disability Studies Quarterly (www.dsqsds.org), said the movie only showed the suicidal side of becoming paralyzed. "It's a natural human response that you'll have these thoughts," she said. "Christopher Reeve

said he had those thoughts, but then he realized he had people who loved him and people he loved. People have less faith in their coping ability, and think, 'I could never cope with that', but many fight to stay alive in face of terminal illness."

Mark Johnson, director of advocacy at Shepherd Center in Atlanta didn't object to the movie as much as the culture that would have made the character Maggie opt for suicide. "Culture sees disability as a negative," Johnson, who uses a wheelchair, said.

Both Haller and Johnson found *Murderball* to be a much more positive depiction of people with disabilities. "They were not portrayed any differently from any other athlete. They got to be as macho, raunchy, competitive and trash talking," Haller said. "They weren't pitied, and the film showed appropriate life experiences."

While *Murderball* was more positive, it also had some elements of the "super crip" stereotype found in many films and TV shows about people with disabilities. "Usually you have the super crip scenario, the overcome scenario or just someone with a disability in the background," Johnson said.

Super crip stories revolve around a person with a disability who performs an extraordinary task, such as one story about a man who is blind and climbed Mt. Everest.

This scenario can cause unrealistic expectations of people with disabilities. "It creates a pedestal that people without disabilities expect people with disabilities to aspire to and it ends up hurting interactions," Haller said. For example, watching a film or TV show about Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) might cause a person without a disability to wonder, "If FDR can do it, why can't you?"

Another scenario often illustrated through film, television or in news articles is showing a person with a disability "overcoming" the disability and participating in regular life activities. Haller pointed to an article that ran in the *New York Times* about a girl who was deaf and played softball. She felt that article wasn't newsworthy because it was just about a person with a disability doing something she wanted to do. The girl didn't have to overcome anything to play softball.



Scenes from Murderball

“This is just the backside of pity,” Haller said. “It’s showing people with disabilities as extra special just because they’re enjoying themselves.”

The overcome scenario portrays people with disabilities as “inspirations” simply because they are living their lives. In reality, people with disabilities are just people who are capable of doing many things, and pointing out their capabilities as something special sets them apart from people without disabilities.

“So many people get their information from the media, so if they’re getting wrong or inspirational information, myths are perpetuated,” Haller said.

Johnson estimates that one in five people have a disability, but that ratio is not reflected in the media. “If you show more people on TV with disabilities, people become more comfortable, and people with disabilities are normalized,” he said.

On the ABC soap opera, *All My Children*, the character Lilly has autism. When the character was first introduced as a child, she was in an institution. Now, she is a teenager and has moved out of the institution to live with her family. While her disability is often openly discussed, and her family can be overprotective, the character also has a boyfriend and experiences typical teenage situations.

Several other shows over the past few years have done a good job of portraying people with disabilities, according to Haller. The CBS show, *Joan of Arcadia*, which was cancelled last year, had a character, Kevin, who became paralyzed after a car accident. The show explored the impact his disability had on him and his family, and how he came to accept his disability.

The NBC show, *Ed*, also had a character, Eli, who used a wheelchair. “In one episode they showed a real person with a disability getting up and going to work. You don’t usually get to see that on TV. It was very tastefully done and a great contribution to disability,” Haller said.

In addition, Daryl Mitchell, the actor who played Eli, uses a wheelchair in real life. “Even if they have a disability theme, many movies and TV shows don’t employ actors with disabilities,” Haller said.

“In the movie *Contact*, there was no reason why

they couldn’t have used an actor who was blind for the part of the scientist who was blind,” she said.

While there are a few actors with disabilities on mainstream TV shows, such as Robert David Hall, the coroner on *CSI* who has had both legs amputated, most actors with disabilities have trouble finding jobs. In California, the Media Access Office is one organization trying to change that, while in Connecticut, the People with Disabilities Broadcast Corporation is at work developing TV pilots featuring actors with disabilities and training people with disabilities on behind-the-scenes work.

Advertising is one arena where actors with disabilities are finding work. Because of truth in advertising rules, companies are not allowed to “fake” disabilities in print and television commercials. “In the early ‘80s, companies started using people with disabilities in advertising. They got a very positive reaction,” Haller said.

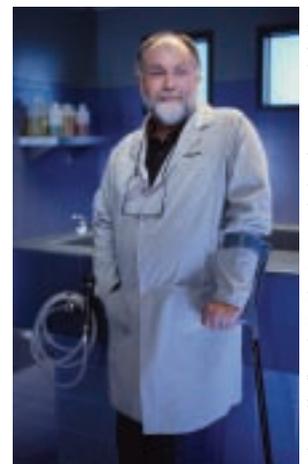
She pointed out that Target noticed products it advertised using actors with disabilities often had higher sales than other products. “People with disabilities buy everything everyone else buys, and they’re loyal customers if you show you care and use people with disabilities in the ads,” she said.

In the future, Johnson hopes to see many more actors with disabilities on TV and film, and he hopes

“It would be nice if shows hired disability consultants the way they hire medical consultants, or at least hire actors with disabilities,”

the stories “represent the true part of who we are. Stories wouldn’t always call attention to the disability, but it would be cool if a character ran into a barrier and the story explored what happened,” he said.

Haller said that while she didn’t want to censor or interfere with the creative process of Hollywood, “I hope media would look like America - the range of people and abilities. It would be nice if shows hired disability consultants the way they hire medical consultants, or at least hire actors with disabilities,” she said. ●



Robert David Hall stars in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. Photo: Lorenzo Agius/CBS © 2002 CBS Worldwide Inc. All Rights Reserved.

OCTOBER

**October 19
Disability
Mentoring Day**
800-840-8844
www.dmd-aapd.org/

**October 19
Disability Diversity
Employment Fair**
Decatur Recreational Center
Decatur, GA
10AM – 3PM
404-687-8890
404-687-9175 TTY

**October 20-21
GCDD Quarterly
Meeting Athens-East
Central Region**
Public Forum Thursday at 7PM
Holiday Inn, Athens, GA
Kim Person 404-657-2130,
kaperson@dhr.state.ga.us
www.gcdd.org

**October 27-29
Children & Adults
with Attention Deficit
Disorder Annual
Conference**
Dallas, TX
800-233-4050

**October 28
Annual Americans with
Disabilities Act Update**
Linthicum, MD
301-217-0124

NOVEMBER

**November 1-3
2005 US Business
Leadership Network
Annual Conference**
Pittsburgh, PA
[www.usbln.com/events/
conference2005.htm](http://www.usbln.com/events/conference2005.htm)

**November 4
Celebration of the
Independent Living
Network**
Atlanta
www.silcga.org

**November 9-12
Annual TASH
Conference**
Milwaukee, WI
www.tash.org

DECEMBER

**December 1-3
World Congress and
Exposition on
Disabilities**
Philadelphia, PA
www.wcdexpo.com

**December 9-11
Abilities Expo/Texas**
Houston, TX
www.abilitiesexpo.com

JANUARY

**January 19-20
GCDD Quarterly Meeting**
The Omni Hotel, Atlanta
Kim Person 404-657-2130,
kaperson@dhr.state.ga.us
www.gcdd.org

**January 27-29
Division E Midwinter
Conference: The
Illusion of Therapy:
Discover the Magic
Within**
Lake Lanier Islands, GA
www.gapsychology.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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**Rose takes her
transportation troubles
into her own hands!**

**Don't Miss Disability Day
February 23, 2006!**



Social Security and Going to Work

By Sally Atwell, M.S., C.R.C., L.P.C.

There is a great deal of misinformation in the community about Social Security and what happens when someone on Social Security goes to work. Many individuals with disabilities want to work, but if they receive any type of Social Security benefits, fear of losing these benefits can discourage people from testing the waters of employment. Therefore, before trying employment, it is important that people with disabilities receive accurate information specific to their situation and that they know how employment will affect their benefits.

In most cases, individuals can still receive benefits while testing their ability to work. Social Security has programs called "Employment Supports" or "Work Incentives" to help people gradually move toward independence and self-sufficiency. These programs are designed to provide support over a long period of time while persons with disabilities determine if they are able to work. Some programs are only for people on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and some are for people on Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Keep in mind that everyone's situation is different and what applies to one person may not apply to another. To find accurate information about a specific situation, it's important to contact the local Social Security office directly.

Generally, persons receiving SSDI have nine years to test their ability to work. They can receive full cash payments during the first year (the nine month Trial Work Period plus a three month grace period). After the Trial Work Period, an individual enters into the 36-month Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE). During the EPE, the individual is entitled to the full SSDI benefit for any month that their earnings are below what is called substantial gainful activity (SGA). In 2005 SGA is \$830/month in gross earned income. This is followed by a five-year period in which cash benefits can start again without a new application if the individual becomes unable to work due to his or her disability. This time period is called Quick Benefits Restart. Medicare can continue during and even after this period.

Those receiving SSI can usually continue to receive a portion of their cash benefit and/or Medicaid coverage while working. If earnings reach a certain level (\$1243 in gross monthly earnings in 2005), cash benefits cease, but eligibility for Medicaid can continue

as long as certain conditions are met. In general, to maintain Medicaid coverage, an individual must still be considered to have a disability by Social Security; they must need the Medicaid in order to work; and, they must meet the resource test.

In 1999, a new law was passed called the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act (PL106-170). This law

includes some new features that make it possible for more people with disabilities to work

and continue working. These features include expanded availability of healthcare services, more choice in where vocational services can be received and the establishment of community-based benefit planning assistance and outreach projects (BPAOs). These projects provide FREE benefits planning and assistance to people with disabilities who receive Social Security benefits and need to know how working will affect those benefits. To find out more about BPAO services and how to contact a benefits specialist in your area, call 1-866-772-2726. ●

"Keep in mind that everyone's situation is different and what applies to one person may not apply to another."



Sally Atwell, M.S., C.R.C., L.P.C.

Project Director, Benefits Navigator Project
Shepherd Center

Sally Atwell has been working at the Shepherd Center, a rehabilitation hospital in Atlanta, for the past 20 years. Currently she is the Project Director for the Benefits Navigator project, a Social Security Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach cooperative agreement. The project provides benefits counseling and information on Social Security's work incentive programs to people with disabilities in 43 counties in Georgia.

Previously, Atwell spent 12 years as the coordinator of vocational services at the Shepherd Center. During that time she was named Counselor of the Year by both the Georgia Rehabilitation Counseling Association (1995) and by the Southeast Region Rehabilitation Counseling Association (1996). In addition, she received the Social Security Administration Regional Commissioner's Citation Award for the Southeast region in 1999. Atwell has a M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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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 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

Employer Resources

Employer Assistance & Recruiting Network
www.earnworks.com

Employment Specialists
www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/vrpractices/index.html

The Job Accommodation Network
www.jan.wvu.edu

National Institute on Disability & Rehabilitation Research
www.worksupport.com

National Organization on Disability
www.nod.org

The Office of Disability Employment Policy
www.dol.gov/odep/

U.S. Business Leadership Network
www.usbln.com

Employment Information

Burnt Mountain Center
 706-692-6016

Cobb & Douglas Community Service Board
www.cobbcsb.com
 770-429-5000

Cobb Microenterprise Center
www.cobbmicro.org
 770-499-3228

Equal Opportunity Publications
www.eop.com/cd.html

Georgia Department of Labor Career Centers
www.dol.state.ga.us/find_career_centers.htm
 404-232-3540

Institute on Human Development & Disabilities
www.uap.uga.edu

National Organization on Disability
www.nod.org

One-Stop Centers
www.dol.state.ga.us/find_one_stop_centers.htm
 404-232-3540

Peer Supporters disABILITY LINK
www.disabilitylink.org/docs/ps/p/peersupport.html
 404-687-8890 Voice
 404-687-9175 TTY
 800-239-2507 (V/TTY)
 404-687-8298 Fax

Statewide Centers for Independent Living
www.silcga.org
 770-270-6860
 888-288-9780
 770-270-5671 TTY
 770-270-5957 Fax

Vocational Rehabilitation
www.vocrehabga.com
 404-486-6331
 404-486-6333 TTY
 866-489-0001 Toll Free
 866-373-7778 Toll Free TTY

Disability and the Media

Disability Studies Quarterly
www.dsqsds.org

Films about Disability
www.disabilityfilms.co.uk

Media & Disability Interest Group
www.towson.edu/~bhalle/aejdis.html

Media Access Office
www.disabilityemployment.org/med_acc.htm

National Center on Disability & Journalism
www.ncdj.org

Nontraditional Casting Project
www.ntcp.org

People with Disabilities Broadcast Corporation
www.pwdbc.org

Screen Actors Guild Performers with Disabilities Study
www.sag.org/content/public/exec-sum-pwd.pdf

Disabilities Study Society
www.uic.edu/orgs/sds

Disability Bibliographies
www.aboutdisability.com/bib.html

Pinning Down Dream Job Leads to Long-Term Employment

by Christina Rosell

For Randy Hedden, finding his job was like knocking 10 pins down with the first ball – he hasn't had to look for a job again because he nailed it the first time. Nearly 15 years later, he still enjoys working for the United States Department of Agriculture's Russell Research Center in Athens, and is building up retirement benefits.

However, it wasn't so easy finding the job in the first place. Ann Hedden, Randy's mom, brought him to a rehabilitation center for job coaching and support. During a nine-month period he was tested in various job situations to see where he could best function. After nearly a year of testing, his mother was told, "We can't get him a job."

Thankfully, Kathy LaFayette of Watkinsville, Ga., didn't agree. She was hired as a job coach through a grant sponsored by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). The grant's focus was to find and secure employment for individuals who may not have otherwise qualified for supported employment services.

"The rehabilitation center that Randy was attending at the time was primarily looking at Randy's deficits," LaFayette explained. "I looked at

Randy and saw all the skills and talents that he did have. He was articulate, he could read, he could write

and he was very skilled in math. Randy was a very independent person."

LaFayette began the job search by listening. "Randy had told me all along that what he really wanted to do was work in a library," she said.

After striking out at Georgia's public libraries, Randy and LaFayette tried another route.

"I then contacted the director of the Russell Research Center and asked him if we could tour the facility to just see the types of jobs that were available there...I thought it might be helpful for Randy to see a variety of jobs that people do," she remembered. "Within a few days, I received a call that there was a need for some part-time help in the Science Library at Russell Research Center."

Soon Randy, who has autism, was shelving and restocking books, sending requested research articles to scientists around the world and recycling paper at the Russell Research Center library.

Supervisors came to recognize Randy as a dependable employee. He always called in if he was sick and planned vacations ahead of time.

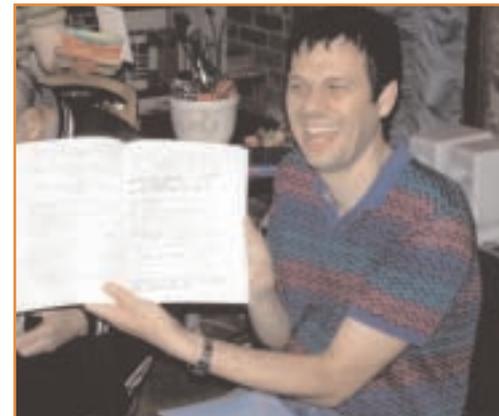
But with the advent of the internet, the Russell Research Center closed its library. Randy's employers didn't let an asset like him walk out the door though, and found other avenues in which he could continue to support the center. Today he works 20 hours a week, 10 under each supervisor, recycling paper and constructing boxes for lab kits.

According to Ann, her son has gained more than job experience at the center. "I watch in awe at the adult that has arrived from the child," she said. "This job has made a big difference in his life, he's giving as well as receiving."

Randy lives independently in his own apartment and cooks and shops for himself. He takes the bus or bikes to work and to the store.

Socially, he has come a long way, too. "When he first started working, his social skills were lacking. They have improved 100%!" his mom exclaimed. Randy enjoys talking and going out to lunch with co-workers, including a chemist who works there. When he's off the clock, he volunteers in the kitchen at church, square dances and bowls in a league, maintaining an average of 150.

"I just keep thanking the Lord everyday that this job has worked out so well," his mom said. ●



"I watch in awe at the adult that has arrived from the child. This job has made a big difference in his life; he's giving as well as receiving."



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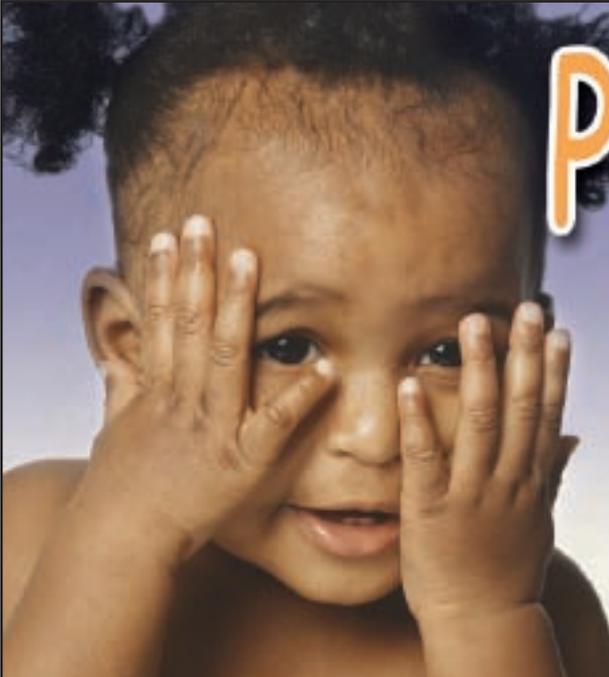
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Making a Difference

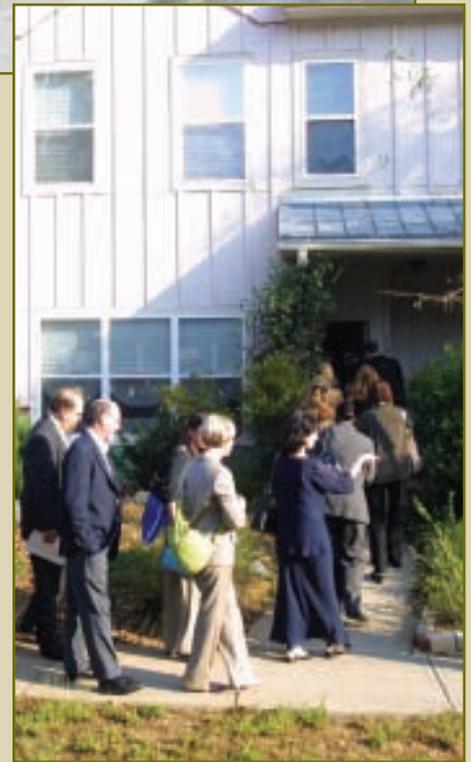
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Making a Difference Discovery Tour October 25

Each year, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) highlights businesses, communities, government agencies and others who are committed to including people with disabilities in its Making a Difference Discovery Tour. Discover the best practices of these organizations in the January issue of *Making a Difference* magazine!



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