Making a Difference Magazine
A Quarterly Magazine of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

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

Summer 2014
Volume 15, Issue 1

On the front cover: Disability rights activist Bob Kafka's panel opens the human right gallery in the "Spark of Conviction: The Global Human Rights Movement" exhibition enabling visitors to make connections to the world of human rights.

On the back cover: Handcrafted quilts representing Centenary United Methodist Church's gifts were designed and created by Dottie Adams for the congregation in Macon, GA.

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

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Tell us your thoughts about the magazine or what topics you would like to see addressed by emailing us at valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov, subject line: **Letters to the Editor.**

How to Reach Us

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

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Be Inspired

Dear Readers,

The summer is a good time for taking in the arts, whether in Georgia or wherever you may choose to vacation. This edition of *Making a Difference* will explore various forms of artistic expression by people with and without disabilities. For many of us, our talents and desires draw us to the arts such as painting, photography, theatre, creating jewelry, music, drama and dance.

In addition to the entertainment and esthetic values, we take a look at how Georgians are discovering that the arts are an excellent catalyst for building community and creating social change.

Social change was celebrated by the disability community on June 23, at the Carter Center as we marked the 15th anniversary of the US Supreme Court *Olmstead* decision, the landmark legislation which originated in Georgia and forever impacted disability rights in America. We heard from speakers and panelists such as Talley Wells of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Eve Hill of the US Department of Justice and Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner, Frank Berry, as well as *Olmstead* plaintiff, Lois Curtis.

Inside this edition of our magazine, you can find the fourth installment of Talley's series on the *Olmstead* decision, Eve's Expert Update on the US Department of Justice Settlement Agreement with the State of Georgia, the beautiful folk art of Lois and a reprint of the poem, *"Lois and Elaine"* by Gail Bottoms, former People First of Georgia president and former member of GCDD.

Finally, many of us have been excited by the opening of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta last month. *The New York Times* called the opening of the Center "the main event" when it crowned Downtown Atlanta as one of "52 Places to Go in 2014." Atlanta has always been designated as the center for so much of the civil rights activities in the United States.

Now we have a place to tell the many stories about people who have struggled for basic civil and human rights including people with disabilities. The Center will house exhibits that reflect the years and hard won battles of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Beginning with the cover photo of this magazine, we take an in-depth look at how the Center is including people with disabilities in its exhibits and message.

Do not sit around and waste your summer. Get out and be a part of the many exciting things happening throughout our State. We hope you enjoy reading this magazine and we want to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts and connections to the civil rights movement by writing to our Editor valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov.

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First Children's Book on Visitability Published

Eleanor Smith, director/organizer of the Atlanta-based advocacy organization Concrete Change, along with Nadeen Green, published the first children's book on visitability called *Libby and the Cape of Visitability* to begin a meaningful conversation about inaccessible homes and how as a community, we can work to change that.

Visitability is a movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes offer specific features to make the home easier for people with mobility impairments.

Written for children ages 8-13, this book raises awareness about the exclusion created when houses are not built with simple accessibility features.

"I wanted the world to be different for the kids and everyone with disabilities," said Smith. "It was a way for kids to get this message and by having a main character that has a disability, a lot of the kids who read it will be able to say, 'Hey! That's me!'."

Smith and Green write about Libby, Aria and Benjamin, all who have been best friends since they were babies. When Aria moves to a new house, Libby, who uses a wheelchair, doesn't get invited to Aria's birthday party because the house has barriers. The kids then meet Everett, an adult wheelchair athlete, who tells them how the disability rights movement gained successes through years of public demonstrations and pressing for laws. Everett shows them a photo from the 1970s portraying people with disabilities blocking inaccessible buses.

The kids are inspired to create their own version of public action to achieve the goal of a step-free entrance and wide bathroom doors in every new house.

The book brings awareness to visitability for children, but also allows parents to interact with the movement by showing what they can do to become involved in the cause.

“It’s important that Georgians educate themselves about visitability, and know that making homes accessible doesn’t cost extra or make it look funny,” Smith said.

Accessible homes benefit people with disabilities, the elderly, and people who are recovering from surgeries or injuries.

A victory for Smith and Concrete Change, which started in 1987 in Atlanta, was the recent mandate passed in Austin, TX that every new home built has to be accessible. The same movement has expanded to Tuscon, AZ and Bolling Brook, IL.

To get a copy of *Libby and the Cape of Visitability*, contact Eleanor Smith at concretechange@mindspring.com .

For more information on Concrete Change and how

you can be involved in the visitability movement, visit www.concretechange.org .

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Call Your Senators and Encourage a Vote for CRPD

Crucial civil rights legislation for people with disabilities currently awaits the US Senate’s vote. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an international human rights instrument of the United Nations that is intended to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities.

Modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, CRPD values independence, respect and the concept of reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. The treaty is vital for creating legislation and policies around the world that embrace the rights and dignity of all people with disabilities.

Even though President Barack Obama signed the convention and forwarded it on to the Senate, it has failed to reach the necessary two-thirds margin required to approve the CRPD. GCDD encourages Georgia citizens to contact Sen. Johnny Isakson and Sen.

Saxby Chambliss urging them to support the convention.

Through advocacy, we can make a difference for Georgians with disabilities and for all those around the world.

Contact Sen. Johnny Isakson at:
Washington DC Office
United States Senate
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Tel: 202.224.3643

Contact Sen. Saxby Chambliss at:
Washington DC Office
United States Senate
416 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Tel: 202.224.3521

POINTS OF CRPD:

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities

GaLEND Graduates 16 Participants

The Georgia Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities graduated 16 participants from its program this past spring.

The program is designed to teach trainees skills to collaborate in the interest of coordinated, comprehensive, culturally competent care on behalf of children and adults with disabilities and their families. “GaLEND participants are future physicians, nurses, psychologists, teachers, social workers and speech-language pathologists along with family members and self-advocates,” said Mark Crenshaw, director of interdisciplinary training at Georgia State University.

The GaLEND is a year-long interdisciplinary training program that is designed to strengthen Georgia’s capacity to respond to the unique gifts and needs of children and adults with disabilities and their families.

GaLEND operates as a program of the Center for

Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University, in collaboration with the Satcher Health Leadership Institute at Morehouse School of Medicine and the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

GCDD Welcomes Jhai James to Team

Jhai James joined the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) staff in May as the public information program associate and social media coordinator. She works closely with Public Information Director and Editor-in-Chief of *Making a Difference* Valerie Meadows Suber to implement all aspects of the GCDD public information and public relations programs.

James is a Georgia native and graduate of Columbus State University, where she was recently employed to coordinate all aspects of social media for the division of Continuing Education. She is pleased and greatly honored to be involved with an organization that works to bring about social change for individuals and families living with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Georgia.

"Since becoming a member of the GCDD team, I have learned so much about commitment, strength and perseverance while developing a passion that grows more deeply rooted each day for our community," James said. "I am thrilled to be in a position to contribute to the Council's ongoing growth and success."

James started her professional career working in broadcast production with WRBL-TV, a CBS network affiliate in Columbus, GA. She has held positions with Amaryllis Productions, a theatrical company based in New York, NY; Harpo Studios in Chicago; and Tribune, Inc. in Orlando, FL. James also worked as a communications specialist with Georgia Council for the Arts where she managed website development, coordinated social media strategy and wrote a variety of materials.

Caitlin Childs Speaks on Panel on Disability Justice

On Saturday, May 3, Real Communities Organizing Director Caitlin Childs represented GCDD at *The Special Education Assembly: a disability justice dialogue* at Community Grounds Café in Atlanta.

Childs spoke about Real Communities and its efforts in the community as a disability justice initiative; how disability rights and disability justice are intertwined with civil rights; and the connection between special education and disability justice.

The panel also consisted of Candall Heard for All About Developmental Disabilities, Sukie Glick from disABILITY LINK, Talley Wells from Atlanta Legal Aid and David Payne of the Restorative Justice Project.

Make a Difference with GCDD!

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is looking for individuals with developmental disabilities and family members who are interested in becoming members of the GCDD Council and advancing its mission of advocacy for people with disabilities.

The mission of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities is to bring about social and policy changes that promote opportunities for persons with developmental disabilities and their families to live, learn, work, play and worship in Georgia communities.

To continue advocating for disability rights, GCDD is currently recruiting Council members for both categories of membership.

GCDD Council members fill two categories. Members appointed by the Governor are considered the “official members” and can serve two terms of four years each. Advisory members, who are selected by Council members, have no voting rights and serve one two-year term.

Council members serve as the link between people with developmental disabilities, their families and the organization. They should become thoroughly acquainted with the issues related to Georgians with developmental disabilities and the way in which GCDD is organized to address those issues.

Members are expected to attend each quarterly Council meeting and to serve on any established committees. Full Council meetings are used to set policies based on the vote of a majority of members present. Recognizing the diversity of the Council membership, it is understood that unanimity will not be possible on all decisions of the Council, but members are urged to be advocates at all times for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

GCDD engages in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities to contribute to a coordinated, consumer and family-centered and directed comprehensive system of community services, individualized supports and other forms of assistance. This allows individuals with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination, independence, productivity and integration into all facets of community life.

GCDD offers a great opportunity for parents and self-advocates to represent the issues that are important for people with disabilities, their families and caregivers in local communities across the State.

Applications and more information on GCDD can be obtained by visiting www.gcdd.org.

Applications for membership should be returned to Eric Jacobson by August 1, 2014 either by e-mail at: eric.jacobson@gcdd.ga.gov or by mail at:

Eric Jacobson
2 Peachtree Street
Suite 26-240
Atlanta, GA 30303

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Express Yourself: How Art is Taking the Stage to Break Barriers

By Devika Rao

The arts are an excellent way for communities and individuals to express their voices through painting, photography, dance, music and more. For some, the arts are also a channel of outreach, engagement and even advocacy.

Such is the case for dancers of Full Radius, an inclusive dance company based in Atlanta that was formed in 1998. The founder, Douglas Scott, was already using dance to work with incarcerated people, senior citizens, people with disabilities and more. “These were bodies that didn’t look like mine, but they were equally capable,” said Scott.

At the same time, the Shepherd Center in Atlanta and VSA Arts of Georgia were planning to organize similar classes in the State and invited Scott to take part in a teacher training. Scott progressed to begin teaching dance classes and then he received an invitation from the band Van Gogh. The band, fronted by two brothers with disabilities, wanted a choreographed dance routine for a concert. As a result, Full Radius was created.

The dance company, now in its 16th year, has been an avenue for dancers with and without disabilities to use art to showcase talent as well as to send a message and break barriers.

“This is about pushing ourselves, pushing our physicality that is beyond what we think we are capable of,” added Scott. “It definitely blows people away.”

Lindy Dannelly, who lives with sacroiliac joint disorder, officially joined Full Radius in 2011 after a one-year apprenticeship. “When I felt that feeling, the way the body does when it’s dancing, I was hooked,” said Dannelly.

Dannelly also writes for the dance blog “Blend, Move, Sway.”

Full Radius is making waves as an integrated dance company that is known for its physicality and its unwavering look at people with disabilities.

Shawn Evangelista immersed himself into Full Radius and its mission and he has gained an important awareness.

“When I am not in the studio and just doing my day-to-day things, I have suddenly become consciously aware of accessibility,” shares Evangelista. “It’s one of the best things I have learned while being at Full Radius.”

It is that awareness that VSA Arts of Georgia wants to expand through the integration of arts for people with and without disabilities. “Art is art,” said Director Elizabeth Labbe-Webb. “And our mission is to make all art available for all people all the time.”

As a wheelchair user, she encourages people with disabilities to become patrons and consults with art venues that want to be more accessible and open.

Currently, VSA Arts of Georgia is housed with the Mason

Murer Fine Art Gallery in Atlanta – a step towards integrating mainstream arts with the disability community.

“There is a teaching level that is important when it comes to integrating with the arts,” she added. “For example, we help galleries and other venues understand what to expect if a group of people with disabilities attends an exhibit or the center.”

The purpose, she says, is to build a wholesome community around the arts.

The organization also works with emerging artists by helping them professionally, identifying their best venues and introducing them to galleries and art shows to further their careers. “We want our artists to be contributing members of society.” said Labbe-Webb. “Art is about finding a way to include everyone.”

“We have seen people around the artists such as friends and family discourage them because the arts are too often thought of as out of the norm or as a scary venture,” she said.

On the contrary, VSA Arts pushes its artists and those around them to go beyond the comfort zone and become self-sufficient monetarily and spiritually. It is also a psychological turning point as it allows the artists to build confidence and self-esteem.

Jonathan Gross, from Dahlonega, is finding his turning point and moving toward self-sufficiency through photography. His newly found form of expression is now a possible career and also an avenue for his family to better connect with him.

Photography became Gross' vehicle of communication. When the 13-year-old with Down syndrome was diagnosed with verbal apraxia, his mom felt as if his world was shrinking. Ultimately, he found his focus and voice through a unique educational tool, the Thousand Words Project, which uses artwork as a form of communication. His mother, Pam Gross said, "Isn't that what every parent wants for his or her child – a promising future?”

Gross was one of many who participated in ConnectAbility’s Thousand Words Gala held in Dahlonega on May 10, which showcased photography produced by teams of mentors and mentees. Each team developed their photography skills and displayed their work in a silent auction.

ConnectAbility, a Dahlonega-based nonprofit, began in 2010 when Jacqueline Daniel wanted to find a way to encourage, enrich and empower children and adults with disabilities, families, caregivers and communities. The organization engages its participants in recreational activities, sports and photography.

“This is the second year we’ve done the Thousand Words Project and it met with great success,” said Daniel. “The purpose is to introduce people to photography and also create a conversation between people with and without disabilities.”

Leading up to the gala, three workshops were held to teach the basics of photography and in the end, 10 photographs were auctioned.

What resulted at the end of the workshops were not only everlasting friendships, but “we found that people with disabilities had so much to say and they did it through photography,” added Daniel. “Once he learned this new tool, Jonathan’s whole world opened up.”

Lois Curtis, the plaintiff in the landmark Supreme Court case *Olmstead versus LC* has been an artist for as long as she remembers.

“My art been around a long time; I came along when my art came along. Drawing pretty pictures is a way to meet God in the world like it is,” she said.

Lee Sanders, one of Curtis’ supports, added, “She does not judge her work and draws without struggle or doubt, each line sure and unbroken. She never uses an eraser. After eight years sitting by Lois’s side as she draws, I’m still amazed.”

In addition to painting, dance and photography, the arts include music.

A professional jazz singer, Myrna Clayton realized there was something missing – a voice that hadn’t been represented. When she surveyed her audience, people could mention Stevie Wonder or Ray Charles when it came to singers with disabilities, but what about artists in today’s music industry? Who was the voice of the many who feel unrepresented?

“No one could name a singer, so I knew I had to do something about it,” said Clayton.

She launched the nonprofit Abel2 in 2010 to provide programming for people with and without disabilities through music and the performing arts. The goal is to educate audiences to become agents of change in their communities.

Performances by Abel2, such as the Holiday Hands in Motion at the Georgia Aquarium, allow people who are deaf and hard of hearing to experience holiday music through expressive sign language and syncopated lighting.

“Everyone is able,” said Clayton, “It is about creating opportunities to let people enjoy the same things we all do. We have to break barriers.”

Her passion for music and launch of Abel2 sparked her advocacy for accessible staging.

“We see a lot of theaters making the seating area accessible, but what about the stage?” she asked. “There is no ramp to the stages and that is where we need to see more people with disabilities.”

Like Labbe-Webb, Clayton shares the sentiment to use art as a way to allow people with disabilities to engage in the broader community and push comfort zones for themselves and those around them.

“Many times, people with disabilities are encouraged to sit back and not get involved and that unexpectedly creates barriers,” said Clayton. “We need to bring these individuals into the spotlight because like everyone they have gifts that are important and should be shared."

Clayton established the Voices Embodied Ensemble (VEE), an inclusive group of musicians and singers who rehearse twice monthly at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta.

VEE vocalist Rusty Taylor is also an accomplished singer with the Columbus Jazz Society who has recorded an album titled *Southern Standard Time*. As a person who lives with quadriplegia, Taylor likes the idea of using the arts to create a more integrated community.

Clayton is recruiting singers to join VEE and hopes to take the ensemble to the 2016 Paralympics in Brazil. "It would be just the best thing to see these singers from all different backgrounds come together for a common purpose and express themselves through this art form."

Whether it's photography, painting, dance or music, the arts offer opportunities for all people, with and without disabilities to express and enjoy.

Abel2 is looking for singers!

To audition for VEE, visit www.abel2.org

For more information on Full Radius Dance, visit www.fullradiusdance.org

Thousand Words Project will be on display in September at the Bowen Center for the Arts in Dawsonville.

Poetry By Gail Bottoms:

TO ELAINE AND LOIS

There were two women, Elaine and Lois
In an institution that wasn't their choice.
They wanted out so they used their voice.
To make a difference was their plan,
To help themselves and their fellow man.
They hired the lawyers who said, "we can,"
and went to fight, their future to plan.
Elaine and Lois went through a big fight,

to set folks straight and put things right.
To tell institutions to go fly a kite,
To live in their community is a God-given right.
They convinced the judge
they could live on their own,
Make their own choices and have their own home.
Thanks, Lois. Thanks, Elaine.
Your action has made it even more plain.
Stand up for yourself, a self-advocate be.
There is nothing to lose and everything to gain.
So tonight we honor you both
for what you have done.
You fought with the system
and thank God you won!

August 5, 1999

Gail Bottoms • Former President, People First of Georgia

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Since *Olmstead*

By Talley Wells

Fifteen years ago, when Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg announced the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Olmstead*, it was immediately clear it would become the most important legal victory for people with disabilities in American history. Yet, little changed in the first years after the decision.

The Supreme Court required Georgia, and each of the other states, to provide people who were confined in institutions equivalent supports in the community. However, because of the complexity of this transformation, the Court said that states could create and carry out plans for transitioning from institutions to the community with reasonably-paced moving waiting lists.

This caveat resulted in a lot of planning and very little changing. Georgia formed commission after commission to study how the State would make changes to comply with *Olmstead*. But it took little action.

Real change did not begin to occur until after a series of Atlanta newspaper articles brought attention to terrible incidents at Georgia's state-run psychiatric hospitals. In their 2007 "Hidden Shame" series for *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Allen Judd and Andy Miller wrote that 115 people died under suspicious circumstances in the state hospitals over a five-year period. The problems were linked to overcrowding and poor care. The series began with the story of Sarah Crider, who was a seventh grade girl who died from lethal constipation caused by her medications.

Three months after the first "Hidden Shame" article, the United States Justice Department began an investigation of the state hospitals. The following year the Justice Department sent Governor Sonny Perdue an open letter with findings from its first investigation. It found that incidents at the hospitals were “serious, recurring, and frequently result[ed] in grave harm.”

Many disability advocates believed that the Justice Department would force Georgia to finally comply with *Olmstead*. These advocates were disappointed in January 2009 when the Justice Department and Georgia reached a settlement that did not include *Olmstead*. Instead, the settlement required Georgia to invest significant resources into the hospitals to ensure that patients were safe and secure. Due to the limited resources of the State, this likely meant that the settlement would actually take from community supports to pay for the changes needed in the hospitals.

Rather than simply accepting the settlement, a Georgia mental health advocate named Cynthia Wainscott sent a letter to the judge asking him not to allow the settlement. Wainscott had gotten leading advocates from across the State to sign on to the letter. Since there were only two parties to the dispute in front of the judge, it was unlikely the letter would have an effect.

It did. The judge ordered briefs to be filed and ultimately decided not to allow the settlement.

A tense period of almost two years followed with Georgia, the Justice Department and disability advocates preparing for a major trial. Despite this tension, and contrary to what happens in many lawsuits, this was also a period of remarkable (if guarded) communication between advocates and state leaders.

Another transformation took place during this time. The US Justice Department, under President Barack Obama decided to make *Olmstead* a key priority of its Civil Rights Division. Georgia became a focal point for this transformation. This meant that the Justice Department moved away from what it had agreed to in the settlement and prepared for a trial in which it would put *Olmstead* at the center of what it was demanding.

In mid-2010, US District Court Judge Charles Pannell made clear to the parties that they had to settle by October 2010 or there would be a trial. On the eve of trial, the parties reached a final settlement that at the time was the most far-reaching *Olmstead* settlement in the country.

Georgia agreed that it would enable every person with a developmental disability living at one of the Georgia Regional Hospitals to transition back into the community. It would also provide supports and housing to ensure that 9,000 people with diagnoses of severe and persistent mental illness could live in the community rather than in institutions or other inappropriate settings. The settlement was scheduled to last from October 2010 through July 2015.

In the four years since the settlement was signed, Georgia has had considerable success in carrying out the mental health part of the settlement. It has had more mixed results with the developmental disabilities part of the settlement.

For people with mental illness, Georgia has created a robust and wide array of services, including 1,400 housing vouchers, Assertive Community Treatment teams, crisis centers and employment. It has closed state hospitals in Rome and Thomasville and closed much of the hospital in Milledgeville.

Georgia has begun the transition of all people with developmental disabilities out of the state hospitals but it has halted the process by agreement between the Justice Department, Georgia and the Independent Reviewer due to significant problems that arose.

In her April 2014 report to the Court, the Independent Reviewer, Elizabeth Jones stated, “Additional time is required for [DBHDD] to finalize its plans for the reform of the system of supports for people with developmental disabilities including the implementations of [Medicaid] Waiver amendments; the restructuring of responsibility and authority at the regional level; the design and implementation of intensive support coordination for medically fragile individuals; the recruitment and retention of provider agencies with the requisite expertise;

and the sustained development of sufficiently rigorous monitoring and oversight strategies. Each of these reform efforts is critical to the health, safety, habilitation and integration of the individuals affected by this settlement."

Georgia is supposed to finalize its plan for complying with the Developmental Disabilities Section of the settlement by the end of June 2014 and publish the plan on the Internet on July 21, 2014.

While the Justice Department Settlement has captured the attention of the State and many *Olmstead* advocates, it is critical to note that the settlement only impacted a subset of Georgians who have *Olmstead* rights. The settlement did not cover Georgians in nursing facilities or children with disabilities. Also, it did very little to diminish the enormous waiting list for Medicaid Waivers for people with developmental disabilities. In fact, Georgia added between 500 and 1,500 Medicaid Waivers per year in the four years prior to the settlement compared with approximately 250 per year during the settlement.

Thus, while little happened at first after *Olmstead*, progress is beginning to be made. Still, we have much further to go.

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History of Disability Rights: Going Forward by Knowing Where We've Been

By H.M. Cauley

With as much fanfare and celebration as befits the arrival of a new landmark, the opening of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in downtown Atlanta heralded a new kind of history center. Part museum, part blueprint for the future, the Center is remarkable on many levels, but one particular aspect sets this destination apart from others: its content is inclusive.

That design was entirely intentional, said the Center's CEO, Doug Shipman, who has been working to breathe life into the $100 million project since 2005.

"Very early on, we knew one of the big ideas was to build a place where a lot of different rights movements were in one place – that had not been done," explained Shipman. "In our initial report, we wrote that we wanted to be very inclusive. And as we went about the design, we asked, 'How do we make disability rights part of that?' "

After consulting with key Georgians who understand the challenges and victories around disability rights, Shipman was convinced that the issue deserved a prominent place in the Center’s story.

Disability rights activist Bob Kafka’s panel opens the Human Rights Gallery in the “Spark of Conviction: The Global Human Rights Movement” exhibition enabling visitors to make connections to the world of human rights.

Through his work with ADAPT, a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to assure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom, Kafka helped drive ADAPT’s WE WILL RIDE victory for lifts on buses and A D A and later worked to support community services for people with disabilities instead of catering to the nursing home industry.

He also has an interview that is featured in the exhibition in the “Who Like Me” section. Here, visitors are asked to choose a trait that describes some aspect of themselves and then they “meet” someone, via an interactive mirror, who tells a story of being discriminated against or persecuted for the very trait they share. Disability rights is one of the 12 featured “traits” – in addition to Black, White, Worker, Girl, Woman, Advocate, Blogger, Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Artist.

That is where visitors can meet Giorgi Ahkmeteli from the Republic of Georgia. He became a wheelchair user at the age of 21 after an accident and found that people in his country had virtually no access to public institutions. Children, in particular, were often hidden away by their families and denied an education. When he came to experience firsthand what it is to be a person with disabilities in Georgia, he realized that people with disabilities represented one of the most marginalized minorities in his country. So he founded a nongovernmental organization called Accessible Environment for Everyone.

"It's a rights movement to really learn from," he said, "because it's the most diverse of any movement. It can [involve] anyone – not just someone of a certain color, religion or ethnicity. You may be born into it or come into it. We want to show the diversity of the disability rights movement – how it's led, how it's sustained. We've talked about what it is and tried to educate people on it; now, the Center is a natural place to talk about it and to say there's a lot more to this than you think."

NCCHR continues the conversation of intertwining disability with human and civil rights by featuring stories including one of Boaz Muhumuza, a disability rights advocate from Uganda. He has become a leading champion of accessibility rights. Despite being blind since childhood, Muhumuza earned a law degree. Having wrestled with challenges himself, he speaks with experience about the difficulties that Ugandans with disabilities face in accessing public services. He argues that creating a more accessible environment would improve life for everyone in Uganda.

The stories continue by taking visitors to Australia where there was a policy of forcing women with disabilities to be sterilized. Although no longer legally required, the practice still occurs prompting human and civil rights activists to state this is denying women a fundamental right to decide if and when they want to have children.

The Center displays the universal impact of civil and human rights through the “Voice to the Voiceless: The Morehouse College Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection” that presents a rare collection of King’s personal papers and items; and, “Rolls Down Like Water: The American Civil Rights Movement” exhibition displaying the modern American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The worldwide struggle for disability rights weaves a complex story. Georgia’s disability history is no exception. Elements of the story can be found throughout communities around the State and arriving at a consensus about where it has been and where it is going is as varied as each group or organization involved in the work.

Recording the story is now the goal of the Georgia Disability History Alliance, a two-year-old group with representatives from around the State who are compiling artifacts, personal stories, historical documents and media articles.

The collected data will be housed at the University of Georgia Richard B. Russell Special Collections Library in Athens. Among those participating in the project is Gillian Grable of UGA's Institute on Human Development and Disability.

"We called it an alliance because it's informal; it's people allied together," said Grable. "There's no budget or structured workspace. It's a free-standing network. We decided to gather people we thought would be interested, and we've had about five meetings so far to tell stories and share information. And of course, there's been a lot of conversation about the Civil and Human Rights Center coming to Atlanta."

The idea to create an Alliance charged with capturing the state's story of disability rights grew out of conversations around how various groups will mark the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (A D A) that was signed into law in July 1990.

The act was based largely on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and is considered a significant piece of civil rights law that promises people with disabilities the chance to participate in every aspect of mainstream life. That connection between disability and civil rights is unique to Georgia, which gave rise to some of the Civil Rights era's most prominent activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and U S Congressman John Lewis.

"So much of the disability rights movement has mirrored what happened in the Civil Rights movement," said Grable. "For those of us who have been working on it here for years, it’s important to offer the histories and stories so people can learn from them, learn about what brings people with and without disabilities together, even how people get around and what they do during the day. My goal is to listen to communities: What do people care about enough to act upon? How can we strengthen habits of welcome and create activities for people with and without disabilities to come together and know each other better?”

Additional momentum to capture the state’s history of disability rights grew out of a meeting last year at the Shepherd Center in Buckhead. The A D A 25 Summit established the A D A Legacy Project with the goal of connecting various records on the history of the movement in anticipation of next year’s A D A anniversary.

Mark Johnson, director of advocacy at the Shepherd Center, spearheads the Legacy Project and supports the efforts of Georgia’s History Alliance as well. His 27 years working in the field has given him opportunities to hear countless stories and witness personal triumphs and tragedies that are now being recorded for the first time.

“I remember several years ago screening a documentary called ‘Lives Worth Living,’ and people kept asking where they’d found the stories,” recalled Johnson. “That got a conversation going about how much of our history had already been lost and how important it was to start preserving it. So once we had the ADA initiative, the question was, ‘What are we doing in Georgia?’ and the answer was to create the History Alliance. We already had this world-class venue in Athens, so we talked to them about starting a collection.”

Johnson dug into his own history to come up with items for the Athens vault. “I gave them 35 years of T-shirts and buttons I wore at rallies, newspaper clippings of stories that might ultimately be an exhibit. It may even wind up at the Center downtown because Georgia’s got a really good story – the problem is, it isn’t in one place yet.”

One group is working diligently to corral the state’s disability rights history in an organized progression. Mark Crenshaw, director of interdisciplinary training at Georgia State’s Center for Leadership in Disability, represents that Center at the History Alliance and has taken on the task of creating a timeline of milestones in Georgia’s disability rights story.

“I have been working with children and adults with disabilities for the last dozen years, and that experience has allowed me to interact with folks who did some pretty important work fighting for rights in Georgia,” said Crenshaw. “I feel a responsibility to make sure their stories are captured and heard and their contributions are respected. I am convinced there’s a lot to be proud of in the fight for disability rights, and the whole community needs to know the stories I’ve been privileged to hear.”

The first begins in 1915 with the birth of Waddie Welcome. The Savannah man with cerebral palsy and limited movement and speech spent most of his life in

Savannah, but when his parents died, Adult Protection Services placed him in a nursing home. When that facility closed in 1986, he was moved to another home three hours away.

His repeated requests to move back to Savannah inspired the formation of an advocacy group dedicated to bringing him home, but the group struggled for 10 years to make Welcome's dream come true.

Welcome, who was named one of Savannah's most influential people in 1999, died in 2001.

"One of first laws they advocated for was a community services act in 1970," said Crenshaw. "It was one of the first public laws to say we need to default first to community services instead of putting people with disabilities into institutions."

One of the most important legislative pieces in disability rights had its roots in Georgia: The *Olmstead* decision.

The high court ordered states to comply with the 1990

Americans with Disabilities Act by establishing community-based services for those with disabilities and clarified the A D A by saying exactly where services should be provided. The landmark case, argued by Atlanta Legal Aid attorney Sue Jamieson, was initially aimed at getting Georgia to comply with the A D A.

"The most exciting and significant aspect of the *Olmstead* case, in my opinion, is that prior to that case the segregation of people with disabilities had been identified as a problem, but there was no legal obligation on the part of the State to remedy the problem," said Jamieson, now the former director of Legal Aid's Mental Health and Disability Rights Project. "The segregation of people with disabilities was finally identified as a form of discrimination, and then it came under civil rights and became a movement specifically for people with disabilities."

Other victories in the state's disability rights campaign have come on a smaller scale, said Tom Kohler, a 31-year veteran of Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy and author of *Waddie Welcome and the Beloved Community.*

"In the mid-1970s, when normalization principles were transmitted through a training process called P A S S (program analysis of service systems), that was a milestone," he said. "It was a set of ideas developed in Scandinavia, and in response to President Kennedy's Council on Retardation, two men went there and saw people with disabilities living in their home communities. That was not what existed in the U S at the time, but we soon were training people on those ideas."

The 1970s was also a period when values-based training took hold. "It was a moment of innovation," said Kohler. "We went back to the fundamental set of assumptions of who people are and what they deserve, challenging typical assumptions and the notion of low expectations for people with disabilities. It offered ways to make people's lives better, to help them have the support necessary to live in their own homes, find real work and participate in community life as contributing citizens. Those ideas were bubbling in the State of Georgia, and people came from other places to see what was going on here. It was a rich learning moment."

"Those stories, both big and small, will find their way into the ongoing story being told at the Center for Civil and Human Rights," said Johnson.

"For the first time, people with disabilities and the struggle for disability rights will be included." he said. "It's not an add-on, or one special day, but something every guest who goes through the doors will see as part of the bigger narrative."

And visitors at the Center are invited to be part of the narrative, explained Shipman.

"You can leave your own testimony, talk about issues you care about and tell your story," he said. "We hope any individual will be inspired to be involved in rights issues and to take them personally. So many people feel it's all about the few heroes out front, but my hope is every visitor sees that the real story is that any individual can be one of those people."

You can be a part of the ADA Legacy Project. Visit www.adalegacy.com/preserve and learn how you can become a part of history.

For more information on tickets, group tours and more on the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, visit www.civilandhumanrights.org

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The Conversation of Dance

By Laurel Lawson

If you meet me and ask what I do, I'll probably tell you that I am a dancer.

Depending on the context, I may say that I'm an artist, or a working artist. Given the askance looks that usually follow – how many professional dancers with obvious physical disabilities have you met? – I'll pull out one of Full Radius', my dance company, postcards and proffer it with a smile.

The smile is because I know what comes next: the head tilts sideways, then the card is turned upside down. Yes, it's real. Yes, that's a dancer. In a wheelchair. Doing a handstand. Yes, that's hard to do.

It’s far from a perfect answer. It’s a compromise that delivers a bit of education and allows me to get on with my life without burning out on the constant explaining. It doesn’t do service to the reality that dance, while requiring skill and dedication, doesn’t actually require flashy physicality, but it’s a start. Sometimes, it’s a start that pulls someone in to experience a performance and become a participant in the conversation.

I grew up playing music, not dancing. Piano first, then other instruments. I stumbled into dance almost by happenstance, just after college, when I was on the fence about attending medical or graduate school. Somehow, I never left.

The performance of any art form requires work and mindful practice; learning music is how I discovered that hard work could be rewarding, and that creating something new was fun. Those skills transfer to pretty much anything you want to pursue, and are often used as justification for arts education. Those skills are important, but art needs no justification other than its existence.

Art is how we, as a society, have conversations about things that aren't easily expressed or heard in language. A work of art isn't some static thing that is archived and changeless; art is an ongoing discussion between the artist, the work and viewers of the work.

Access to view, engage with, and create art is a means of determining who is and isn't a part of that conversation. Art enables us to share visceral and emotional experiences and concepts in a way that slices through boundaries.

Particularly for people with disabilities, art is a means by which we can communicate across perceived barriers of language, thought process and embodiment.

There are many ways to actively engage in art, in that ongoing conversation. You can participate by viewing or listening to art, by discussing it, by volunteering for arts organizations or helping to produce performing arts, by taking classes or learning an art, by creating or participating in public or private art projects.

Art, in creation and engagement, rewards diversity of viewpoints, inputs and experiences in a truly unique fashion.

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A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Art as Communication

By Pam Gross

We were first approached late last year about the idea of Jonathan participating in the Thousand Words Photography project and we were very excited about the opportunity for Jonathan to be a part of this.
To test the waters to see how Jonathan might like photography, we gave him a camera for Christmas. He took over 300 pictures in about two hours. He took pictures of the towel rack in the bathroom and even closed the bedroom door, turned off the light, and took pictures in the dark.

Obviously, Jonathan had discovered a love for photography. And we discovered a window into the world of Jonathan. It was interesting to see the content and the perspective of some of his photos. It was surprising to see how he found objects of beauty or points of interest where no one else had seen them.

Mostly, it was rewarding to see how this new hobby helped to expand Jonathan’s world by allowing him an avenue to express himself.

Most individuals have the ability to communicate his or her thoughts, needs and innermost desires. But there are quite a few folks in our community who are unable to fully express themselves.

Jonathan is just one of them. I was perfectly fine when we found out at his birth that he has Down syndrome. But I cried for two days when we received the diagnosis of his verbal apraxia because I knew that Jonathan’s world was now made even smaller. I tell you this not for your pity, but for your understanding.

Through arts, specifically photography, I can’t describe how impacting it is for us to see our child’s world expand because he now has another way to show his point of view.

It’s a pretty huge breakthrough.

Jonathan’s world will continue to grow as a result of the Thousand Words Project. We’ve already received a few requests for prints of some of his photos and are now considering how Jonathan may be able to take his new found hobby and develop it into a future career. We are excited for him to start on a path to be a happy and productive adult with a job that he loves.

A lot of it was because Jonathan’s mentor, Bethany O’Bryant, was kind and full of patience but more importantly for consistently presuming competence. That confidence in our child’s ability has helped to shape his future that is bright and full of hope.

Discovering this avenue of photography and through the Thousand Words Project, it provided us with the wonderful opportunity to not only participate but also helped provide us with a path for our son that may ultimately result in a career.

We had no clue that Jonathan would enjoy photography until we put a camera in his hands. We had no idea how he would use photography as a means to express his point of view or how impacting it would be for our family. So, we encourage you to continually introduce your loved one, especially if he or she is predominately non-verbal, to new ways to express him or herself.

Photography, painting, music, dance or any of the arts should be regarded as an incredible opportunity for growth.

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Assistive Technology Paves the Way for Disabilities

By Devika Rao

Technology is a way of life now. The evolution of the Internet and proliferation of devices have vastly changed the way we interact and communicate over the past decade. Groundbreaking technological advancements that assist people with disabilities with daily living and work are finally keeping up with the mainstream.

Assistive Technology, or A T, according to the Assistive Technology Industry Association, is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities.

Liz Persaud works for Tools for Life, an initiative that is part of Georgia's Assistive Technology Act Program. It is dedicated to increasing access to and acquisition of A T devices and services for Georgians of all ages and disabilities so they can live, learn, work and play independently and with greater freedom in communities of their choice.

The purpose of the initiative is to provide technical assistance and develop webinars, in-person training, partnerships and collaborations for the State of Georgia.

It includes an A T evaluation service called TechMatch which helps individuals find the right technology for their situation.

“It varies from low tech to high tech devices – anything that can make access to everyday items and information easier,” said Persaud, who lives with muscular dystrophy.

The range of low technology to high technology devices includes magnifiers; manual wheelchairs; calculators with audio outputs; computer software with screen readers and spell-check; and text-to-speech applications; and power wheelchairs that elevate, tilt and recline.

At the Center for the Visually Impaired’s VisAbility

Store, many low to middle tech items such as reading machines and color identifiers are available to people with disabilities that assist people with everyday routines.

Under the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Project for Assistive Technology (GPAT) supports local school systems, colleges and universities to provide A T devices and services to students with disabilities.

GPAT was not only working on adaptive and A T in hardware or software, but also equipment. And then, the program expanded to include colleges and universities in 2005.

“It started as a distributive training for colleges and universities, but then expanded to conversion of supplementary materials and textbooks to become more accessible for students with disabilities,” said Christopher Lee, PhD, director of AMAC Accessibility Solutions and Research Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Formerly the Alternative Media Access Center, AMAC came out of the University System of Georgia in 2005 to help post-secondary disability services offices provide complete, timely and efficient accommodations to students with print disabilities.

AMAC has since grown to include development of technology along with training and technical assistance. It also includes AccessGA, formerly the Access IT, a joint initiative of the Georgia State ADA Coordinator’s Office, AMAC and the Georgia Technology Authority.

Its purpose is to support Georgia state agencies with Information and Communication Technology accessibility, promoting equal and timely access for employees and customers with a wide range of disabilities.

Development and Affordability

Development of voice-recognition software and predictable text in smartphones has revolutionized mainstream technology, and in turn, assistive technology as well. High tech devices and technology development such as voiceover and augmentative communication devices enable people with disabilities to communicate effectively.

Persaud utilizes 25 to 30 pieces of assistive technology in her daily life. Ranging from low tech to high tech, the ability of adaptive technology has allowed Persaud to live and maintain an independent life.

“I use my voice for everything,” added Persaud.

Muscular dystrophy causes a drastic drop in energy, and as these devices help Persaud navigate her daily life, they also minimize her use of energy. TextHelp is a predictive text software that allows Persaud to minimize keystrokes thus saving her energy.

Accessible features like voiceovers and spellcheck applications like Ginger, a software that removes language barriers between people, prides itself in “reducing the stress associated with writing by ensuring grammatically perfect, typo-free text bursting with expression and meaning," according to Ginger's website.

"These are integrated and robust, and although they were created with the mainstream market, they are inadvertently becoming learning aids and useful for people with disabilities," added Lee.

However, technology, of any kind, can be financially daunting. The more innovative it is, the more it costs until it's demanded enough in mainstream markets to lower costs.

About 10 years ago, when Rebecca Brightwell entered the A T field, she was shocked at how expensive this technology was and how *monetarily* inaccessible it was to families, children, students and adults who rely on it.

"There is definitely a need for assistive technology, but it is financially straining," said Brightwell, associate director of the Institute on Human Development and Disability at University of Georgia. She focuses on the area of A T.

Dragon, the most popular speech-recognition software, was developed over 20 years ago. When it first came into the market, it had an exorbitant cost of $25,000. Years later, the rising demand finally brought the prices to a reasonable $150-$700. The software is also available as a mobile application for smartphones.

Brightwell also focuses on making assistive technology at a low cost.

“I realized that people wanted to learn and by finding simple ways to empower people to think creatively, we can make accessible, universal designs that can help people,” she added.

Brightwell engaged students to develop basic switches that could help a person who hadn’t developed motor skills and who found it hard to turn a doorknob. Utilizing items like a CD case, stereo wire and some tape, she can make a switch in 30 minutes and enhance someone’s way of life.

“These cost you $80, at most, and there are many small and simple ways that can lead someone towards independent living,” Brightwell said.

As today’s world becomes more technology driven, there is a growing segment of technology companies that are recognizing AT as a viable market. Ongoing development will result in greater accessibility and lower costs.

Section 508

It’s not just technology devices that are becoming prevalent in our modern society. In addition to technology devices, there is greater focus on making the Internet more accessible.

According to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the provision requires that Federal agencies’ electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities. The Information Technology Accessibility & Workforce Division, in the US General

Services Administration’s Office of Government-wide Policy, has been charged with the task of educating federal employees and building the infrastructure necessary to support Section 508 implementation.

Although it works at the federal level, “the rule for the private sector lies within the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Department of Justice issued a ruling that it does apply to the states as well,” said Arthur Murphy, PhD, and special project consultant with AMAC. Murphy specializes in user experience design and also served as a member of the committee responsible for drafting the US Section 508 Standards.

The Future of Technology

As we become more comfortable with voice recognition devices, speech-to-text applications and software, Lee talks about the future of technology.

“Robotics is the next step to help make everyone’s life easier,” said Lee. “The things you see on TV are now doable, and a couple of years ago they might have been a big deal. But as technology develops, robots will also become the norm and serve as an extension to the technology we already use. Over time, they are going to be more affordable as well."

Persaud agrees. "Robotics is exploding in the assistive technology field," she adds. At AMAC, she works with VGo, a tele-presence robot that allows Persaud to be present in the AMAC offices if she were to work from home.

From her Alpharetta home, she is able to connect with VGo and work at her offices at Georgia Tech. "This isn't like teleconferencing," she clarifies. "I, or anyone, can control the robot via telecommuting and be able to function and be productive at work as if I were physically there. I can go 'visit' my coworkers, sit-in on meetings and still be engaged in the office."

Ideas that were once out of the norm such as virtual reality and telepathy are also starting to be utilized to advance technology. For people who aren’t verbal, “technology is advancing to be able to use brain waves to control objects or eye-gazes can be used to determine a selection,” Brightwell adds.

Persaud also notes that recreational activities are getting the benefit of AT. Something as simple as a fishing rod that can be mounted to a wheelchair or bucket seats for those wanting to ski are just other ways that A T is allowing everyone to work, play and live in an inclusive community.

These forms of technology are in prototype phases, but are being used to purposefully do something and are showing a lot of promise in terms of assistive technology. AMAC and similar groups are also focusing on technology that will benefit aging and wounded veterans.

By continuing to develop technology that focuses on large electronic print, speech-to-text, voiceover and now, robotics, the goal remains to promote independent living and inclusion in the community for people with and without disabilities.

To learn more about assistive technology and available resources, visit www.amacusg.org .

To learn more about AccessGA and its work in the State of Georgia, visit www.accessga.org .

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How *Olmstead* Settlements Are Focusing on Quality Services

By Eve Hill

In America, the phrase “Civil Rights” evokes powerful emotion, conjuring up visions of the 1960s, of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and of students at lunch counters and university doors.

These were the disability community’s models for civil rights advocacy. This year, we celebrate landmark anniversaries of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Olmstead v. LC*. These legal landmarks, together, show that disability rights are an essential part of the civil rights movement and that separate is not equal – for any group of people.

In Georgia, the home of the *Olmstead* decision, the State and the Department of Justice are concluding the fourth year of a multi-year Agreement to transform the state's service system for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health disabilities. We are working together to fulfill the promise of these legal landmarks for citizens with disabilities.

The *Olmstead* case has rightly been called the *Brown v. Board of Education* of the disability rights movement. *Olmstead* marked the first time the Supreme Court formally recognized that unjustified segregation of people with disabilities is discrimination in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (A D A). The Court recognized that unwarranted "confinement in an institution severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement and cultural enrichment."

At the Department of Justice, we believe the ability to be part of your community is the right from which all other rights flow.

Since 2009, the Department of Justice has participated in approximately 44 *Olmstead* matters in 24 states. Georgia is one of eight states to reach *Olmstead* settlements with the Department that are directly affecting over 46,000 people with intellectual, developmental, mental health and physical disabilities.

Nothing in the A D A or the integration mandate is limited to residential settings. *Olmstead* points to a variety of everyday life activities that are harmed by unnecessary segregation. The Department has expanded its *Olmstead* work to look beyond just where people live to examine how people live. Simply moving someone from an institution to a community-based residence does not achieve community integration if that person is still denied meaningful integrated ways to spend their days and is denied the opportunity to do what we all do – work in the community.

Olmstead means that people with disabilities have a right to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate for them. Our settlements don’t focus on closing institutions (although to date, 17 states across the nation have closed all of their large state-run I C Fs). Our settlements focus on making sure quality services are available in people’s communities – so people have viable options to receive services without submitting to unnecessary segregation.

Our *Olmstead* work depends on the work of local advocates – people with disabilities, parents, service providers, advocates and others – who let their policymakers know they want to live in their communities – who let us know where this civil right is being systemically violated – and who support people as they make their way into the community. Policymakers on every level of government have become partners in the transformation of systems that for too long perpetuated unnecessary institutionalization.

For so long people with disabilities have been marginalized and discounted, and assumed to be incapable of contributing meaningfully. Public and private services were designed within this mindset.

Those attitudes have shifted, and people are telling us how their lives have changed for the better as a result. But much work remains. We have no illusions about the significance of the challenges ahead. But we will make progress, working together, toward fully enforcing the civil rights of all of our citizens.

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Exercise for All

By Pat Nobbie, PhD, Mia's mom

Those of you that have followed Mia's Space are aware that we have struggled with her weight. She is either unconcerned or actively works to thwart our every good intention. By "our" I mean her siblings, Laura, Joe, Fabersha, Lindsey, Wanda, Toni, Wanda and the other staff at St. Mary's, her swim coaches and other friends who have been engaged in the "Love to Lose Campaign."

Regardless of weight loss however, Mia is healthy and fit and contributing to this is the healthy living class in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia. Zoe Young, a PhD student, created the program due to her interest in the health of adults with disabilities.

She conceived an idea to bring adults with developmental disabilities into the Department located in the Ramsey

Center to do weight training, balance and coordination, cardio, and also have fun. UGA students work with participants for 90 minutes, twice a week. They started with five participants and 7 students in 2012. This past semester the course had 25 participants and 32 students!

The UGA students are freshmen or sophomores, and come from exercise and sport science, biology, psychology, public health and nutrition science majors. Most of them want to become healthcare professionals of some kind and they enroll in the program to learn how to problem solve and interact with individuals with disabilities.

Young says she has learned many things from organizing this program. The students had to learn new ways of getting to know the participants and had to think about the limitations of clinical tools, like imaging, and the design of exercise equipment that presents barriers to people with disabilities.

As a result, Young has undertaken research to redesign those tools, and the students created a fitness room with cheap and easy-to-use exercise stations for individuals with all kinds of disabilities as their final project. During the process of creating those exercise stations, the students brought out several issues and barriers that people with disabilities face when they enter a typical fitness center. The students wanted to make sure that their fitness room was inclusive and welcoming. From the beginning it was a learning experience for both the participants and the students.

“One of our hopes is to export this program model to other universities or hospitals so we can benefit more students and individuals with disabilities,” shares Young.

The unique thing about the program is that it is a partnership between the community and the university. Students help participants from the community to become more physically active and eat healthier and the participants educate the students by providing person-to-person experiences. “Using students who register for credit hours allows us to take an individual approach towards each participant with different needs and create a personalized wellness plan. This program also allows students to get early exposure to different disabilities and health conditions. As most of our students are entering the healthcare field, we think that this would be a good way to promote a more inclusive and friendly healthcare environment in the future. We really hope to make a little contribution to the field of disability and health."

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Quilts Display Gifts and Talents of Congregation

On a 26-by-26 wall at Centenary United Methodist Church that was once bare now hang handcrafted quilts designed and made by Dottie Adams, GCDD's Individual and Family Supports Director.

GCDD's Real Communities Initiative, Adams got close to the people that make up the congregation and their work in the Macon community. A project she took on all on her own, Adams designed six quilts and eight small banners that best represented the congregation.

"It's a very diverse group of people and I just wanted to tell their story through something I already love to do," Adams said. With various textures, colors and patterns, the quilts exemplify the work that Real Communities, along with using personal gifts, is doing to help people achieve a better sense of self and connection to community.

Located in College Hill Corridor in downtown Macon, GA, Centenary United Methodist Church was founded in 1884. Once a vibrant congregation, over time and with changes in the neighborhood, the congregation's numbers dwindled. It became clear that both the church and neighborhood would not survive unless major changes were made. In 2005, the church began to work actively to reach out to and engage the surrounding neighborhood. The neighborhood reached back and saved the church.

One way this has happened is through the Roving Listener project, where youth with disabilities worked alongside youth without disabilities to participate in deep listening in the Beall's Hill, Huegenin Heights and Pleasant Hill neighborhoods of Macon during the summers of 2012 and 2013. Participants listened for gifts, skills and dreams of older and newer residents of this changing neighborhood. The Roving Listener project was such a huge success that the community opted to continue roving one day a month and host monthly community dinners throughout the year. This summer, the youth are using the information they collected to facilitate community dinners, encouraging neighbors to come together around common interests by offering mini grants for small community projects.

Bruce Anderson, founder of Community Activators, has been working with Centenary United Methodist Church to further identify and utilize church members' core gifts for the past year. "It was about engaging people in the congregation to find and use their gifts. It makes a profound difference in the way someone sees themself," said Anderson.

By engaging people in the workshops and all-day trainings, "we discovered a lot of gifts in our community that are hidden and underutilized," said Stacey Harwell. "We are also realizing that we are as community all more similar than different."

These efforts and more have been captured in Adams' quilts which she started working on in November 2013. They display roving listening, the community garden, human rights, friendships, classes for ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), Centenary School of Creative Education and more to allow the story of Centenary's work to be displayed artistically.

Smaller banners with "Thank You" and "You're Welcome" are quilted in eight different languages along with images to represent different talents. These pieces adorn dynamic and colorful banners that represent the inclusive community that Centenary is building through its work. Two larger quilts, measuring 13-feet wide that can be spread across two queen-sized beds, display gifts that Roving Listening, Core Gift interviews, and the programs through Centenary are discovering about its community.

Adams hopes that those who see them are able to see their personal story within the fabrics. She says, "There are different ways people share their talents, and I am hoping they have a chance to see themselves in some way through the quilting."

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How I Use Assistive Technology

By Tracy Rackensperger

My name is Tracy Rackensperger. I am a public service faculty member at the University of Georgia, Institute of Human Development and Disability (IHDD). I have worked at UGA for over nine years now in the development of course content for the introductory course of our Disability Studies Certificate Program, and serve as instructor for this course.

I am also a PhD candidate majoring in social foundations of education. With so much under my belt, I heavily rely on assistive technologies for employment, education and recreation. I see assistive technology as any object(s) helping a person with a disability complete a task because without this item, the person would either have great difficulty with or be unable to complete the task. This way of thinking incorporates the high assistive technologies items I use, like my power wheelchair and augmentative communication device. Additionally, this way of thinking incorporates the low assistive technologies items I use, such as the sports bottles I drink out of and the modified forks I use to feed myself.

At work, I use a lot of assistive technology. I use powered adjustable tables that allow me to raise and lower my work surfaces and monitors throughout the day. They are sturdy and easy to use. Both at work and for my education, I use dual computer monitors and I also use Bluetooth to connect my communication device to computers as well as adapted keyboards to type. I use a communication device to communicate with people who have difficulty understanding my own natural speech. People who have known me for a while can understand my natural speech almost all the time, but strangers usually have no clue what I am saying unless I use augmentative communication. I use my device to interact with students, classmates, coworkers, strangers and friends. I prepare class lectures on my personal computer and then upload files to my communication device.

At home, I replaced my standard deadbolt with a keyless front door lock and I can unlock the door with the press of a button on a keypad via a code that has been programmed on the keypad. The keypad can even be lit in the dark to make entering in my code easier. Plus, I have support people who assist me with things like getting up. With their own personal codes, they can enter my home with just a few simple pushes of a button and lock it with just one. I get more control over who has access to my home. I just assign a code to whoever needs one and delete it when I see fit.

Assistive technology is not just for work. Outside of work, I am really into sports and recreation. I am a big snow skier, and I use what is called a bi-ski. A bi-ski is a ski with a bucket seat and two skis. I ski with the assistance of an instructor using stabilizing outriggers and tethers. I lean the direction I want to turn the bi-ski. The bi-ski has a lift mechanism for getting onto a chairlift. I participate in many other sports using assistive technology including power (wheelchair) soccer.

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CALENDAR

July

July 21
GCDD 2014 Listening Tour
Savannah, GA
gcdd.org/2014-listening-tour.html

July 22
GCDD 2014 Listening Tour
Columbus, GA
gcdd.org/2014-listening-tour.html

July 22
Investing in Gifts and Stories:
Transforming Ourselves
and Our Communities (Webinar)
www.abcdinstitute.org/events

July 23 – 26
45th Annual Autism Society
National Conference

Indianapolis, IN
www.autism-society.org

July 25 – 27
Abilities Expo
Houston, TX
www.abilitiesexpo.com

August

August 3 – 5
2014 Reinventing Quality Conference
Baltimore, MD
www.reinventingquality.org

August 15 – 17
People First of Georgia Annual Conference
Epworth by the Sea (Brunswick), GA
404.883.8274

August 21
VSA Arts Community Events
Program Orientation
Atlanta, GA
www.vsaartsga.org

August 21 – 23
NAMI Alabama 2014 Annual Meeting
Montgomery, AL
namialabama.org

September

September 5 – 7
Abilities Expo
Boston, MA
www.abilitiesexpo.com

September 10
TASH Regional Conference –
Promoting Self-Determined Futures
Atlanta, GA
www.tash.org

September 17 – 18
Mid-Atlantic ADA Update Conference
Baltimore, MD
ADAupdate.org

Sept 30 – Oct 2
ARC of US National Convention
New Orleans, LA
www.convention.thearc.org

October

October 2 – 3
Evidence-based Practice in Disability Disciplines Conference
Flagstaff, AZ
www.nau.edu

October 6 – 7
National Council on Disability
Atlanta, GA
www.ncd.gov

October 6 – 8
Georgia Association of People Supporting Employment First
Annual Training Conference
Athens, GA

www.gapsenetwork.com

October 9 – 12
Self-Advocates Becoming
Empowered Conference
Oklahoma City, OK
muconf.missouri.edu/sabe2014

October 16 – 17
GCDD Quarterly Meeting
Atlanta, GA
404.657.2126

Highlight:

The road to the Capitol starts with your voice . . .

GCDD 2014 Listening Tour

July 21 - Savannah, GA • July 22 - Columbus, GA

For information, visit www.gcdd.org/2014-listening-tour.html

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RESOURCES

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

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)

www.gcdd.org
404.657.2126 or
888.275.4233 (ASK.GCDD)

State Government

Georgia Senate &
House of Representatives

www.legis.state.ga.us

Georgia Governor's Office

www.gov.state.ga.us
404.656.1776

Department of Community Affairs

www.dca.ga.gov

Georgia Housing Search

www.georgiahousingsearch.org

877.428.8844

Department of Labor

www.dol.state.ga.us

General Information

www.georgia.gov

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office

www.ltgov.georgia.gov

404.656.5030

In The News

Concrete Change

www.concretechange.org

Around GCDD

Call For GCDD Council Members

www.gcdd.org

Express Yourself: How Art is Breaking Barriers

ConnectAbility

www.connectabilityinc.org

Full Radius Dance

www.fullradiusdance.org

Abel2

www.abel2.org

VSA Arts of Georgia

www.vsaartsgeorgia.org

History of Disability Rights: Going Forward by Knowing Where We've Been

National Center for Civil and Human Rights

www.ncchr.org

Georgia Disability History Archive

www.fcs.uga.edu

American Disabilities Act: ADA Legacy Project

www.adalegacy.com/preserve

Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy

www.savannahcitizenadvocacy.org

Assistive Technology Paves the Way for Disabilities

AMAC Accessibility Solutions and Research

www.amacusg.org

AccessGA

www.accessga.org

Section 508

www.section508.gov

Expert Update

Faces of Olmstead

www.ada.gov/olmstead/faces_of_olmstead.htm

Mia's Space

Love to Lose Campaign

Kevin McCully, mccully@uga.edu

Real Communities

Centenary United Methodist Church

www.centenarymacon.org

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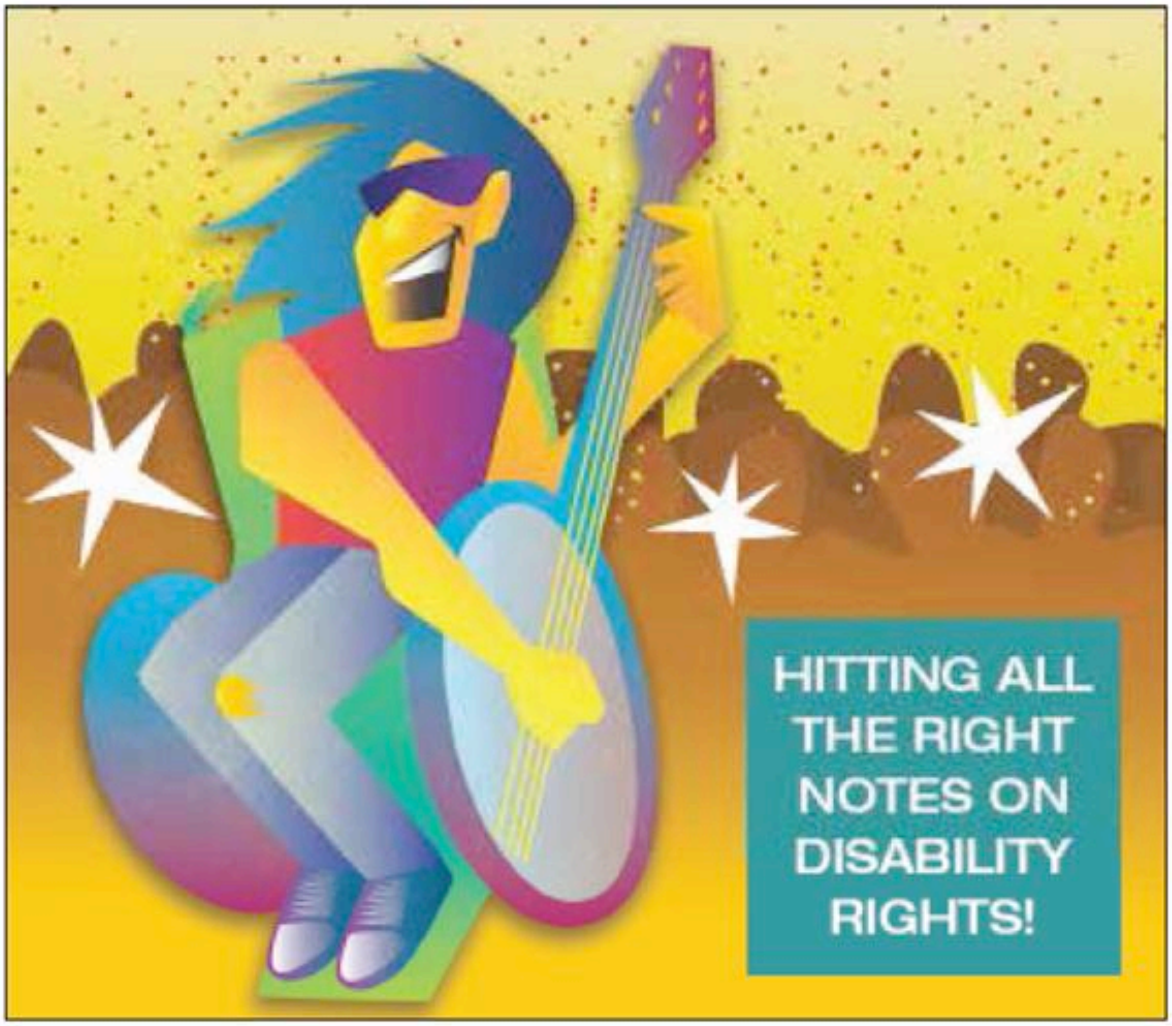
Cartoon and Ads



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