

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 2017

Volume 18, Issue 2

On the Cover: VaShaun Jones, at work in his Decatur studio, runs Fedora Outlier, a company that boasts over \$1 million in revenue, with a global team of 32 employees based in locales such as the US, Japan, Canada and Barbados

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.

Eric E. Jacobson

Executive Director

eric.jacobson@gcdd.ga.gov

2 Peachtree Street NW

Suite 26-246

Atlanta, GA 30303-3142

Voice 404.657.2126
Fax 404.657.2132
Toll Free 1.888.275.4233
TDD 404.657.2133
www.gcdd.org

O'Neill Communications
Devika Rao
devika@oneillcommunications.com
Nancy O'Neill
Design & Layout

On the Back Cover: Save the Dates for GCDD's 2018 Advocacy Days coming in January! Pictured are photos from last year's advocacy.

GCDD VIEWPOINT

Make the Shift

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Its purpose is to make society, government and businesses aware that people with disabilities want to go to work and they make good employees. The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) supports programs like Project SEARCH and Take Your Legislator to Work Day and pushes efforts like Employment First.

Over the next few months, GCDD will support new efforts to assist providers that are interested in becoming supported employment providers. We believe we can increase the number of people with disabilities who go to work; and we believe we can increase the number of businesses who are willing to employ people with disabilities.

But, we alone will not be successful. Georgia will not be successful at making sure people with developmental disabilities go to work until we decide that employment is the priority. This means raising the expectation for people with developmental disabilities, families and providers. We must assume that young people leaving high school are on the path toward a job. This means that they are not going home to sit on the couch. They are not going to the sheltered workshop to sit around putting things in bags and getting paid pennies. They are going to work and getting paid at least minimum wage. This means we must change the Medicaid Waiver rate structure that currently supports workshops better than it supports work. Medicaid Waivers pay providers approximately \$17,000 per year to support people in workshops. The Waivers pay supported employment providers approximately \$7,000 a year to support people who go to work.

I get it. If I am a provider it makes sense. \$10,000 a year more and it's easier to have people in one place. For families, it means that individuals have a place to go five days a week. However, if we want more people to get jobs, we must change the funding model. We must flip the dollars or make them even. In Georgia, we must decide that employment for people with disabilities is the priority.

This should not be done without much careful thought and without assistance. At GCDD, we think there must be a technical assistance team that will assist providers as they transition. But much of our resources need to be focused on supporting people who want to go to work and on those who help them go to work. Now is the time to begin making this shift.

Finally, we must keep up our advocacy efforts. As I write this, there is yet another effort in the US Congress to decimate the Medicaid program in the name of states' rights. Repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act and creating a per capita cap on Medicaid will result in millions of Georgians losing access to healthcare and long-term supports. Please continue the effort to tell your elected officials your story about how these programs have improved your life.

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

Eric E. Jacobson, Executive Director
eric.jacobson@gcdd.ga.gov

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

Letters To The Director.

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

Contact the magazine:

info@gcdd.org

P: 404.657.2126, F: 404.657.2132

or: 2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 26-246

Atlanta, GA 30303-3142

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Devika Rao at 678.384.7836 or

devika@oneillcommunications.com

IN THE NEWS

GCDD Receives Community Impact Award for #SaveMedicaid from GHF

Georgians for a Healthy Future (GHF) honored GCDD with its Community Impact Award at the organization's Consumer Health Impact Awards dinner on Sept. 27 at Park Tavern in Atlanta, GA. The award recognized GCDD for its #SaveMedicaid campaign held in the summer.

The GHF mission is to build and mobilize a unified voice, vision and leadership to achieve a healthy future for all Georgians.

"GCDD is critical to promoting equity and access of all kinds for people with disabilities in Georgia and that alone is worthy of recognition. This year especially, the organization has been outstanding in your efforts to organize and mobilize a response to efforts to dismantle Medicaid," said Laura Colbert, executive director of GHF.

The campaign, launched June 19, worked aggressively to educate and inform advocates, media and policymakers of the dire effects the American Health Care Act (AHCA) would have on Medicaid and people with disabilities.

Eric Jacobson, executive director of GCDD, said, "This award and recognition truly belongs to our great advocates around the State of Georgia who called and emailed their legislators; shared their stories; or rallied to have their voice heard. This is a true testament that advocates are strong and advocacy works. We are very honored and proud."

GCDD Chair Appointed to National Council Board

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Chair Mitzi Proffitt has been appointed to the board of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD). Proffitt, who is in her second Council term, was nominated by GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson and is the only representative from Georgia. A parent advocate for her son Joshua, who has developmental disabilities, she is pleased she'll get to have a say in a field where she is involved personally and professionally.

"I felt very honored because I love knowing I'll get to represent Georgia," she said. "I hope that it helps us get more attention here and that we're being heard on whatever the issues are – maybe my voice will be the voice of Georgia."

More of a strategist, Proffitt wants to bring what she learns from her time on the NACDD board and apply it to local operations. "I sit back and listen a lot – if I feel like it's time to say something, I'll speak up." She added, "I'm hoping this is going to give me an inside link to when things are happening in [Washington] DC, and how we can jump on it and accomplish it in Georgia."

The NACDD, a national association for the 56 councils on Developmental Disabilities (DD Councils) across the United States and its territories, provides technical assistance to all DD Councils and nationally advocates for public policy agendas and appropriations in Congress.

Maria Pinkelton Joins GCDD

GCDD is excited to welcome Maria Pinkelton to the team as its new Social Media Director. Pinkelton has worked in the fields of communications and disability for 18 years. Prior to joining GCDD, Pinkelton served as senior communications specialist for the Cox Media Group.

In addition, she has held communications, advocacy and project management roles with the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University, Bobby Dodd Institute and BlazeSports America. Maria is a graduate of Georgia State University where she majored in creative writing and psychology.

“In my many years working with Georgia’s disability community, I have seen the impact that GCDD has on people with developmental disabilities and their families. I am thrilled to communicate the efforts of such a great organization using the ever-evolving tools of social and digital media. My goal is to maximize the reach of GCDD’s voice and to educate as many citizens as possible on the work that we do and the lives that we touch,” shared Pinkelton.

STRAIGHT TALK

Medicaid Matters

By Parker Glick

“Medicaid Matters!”

“Would you rather go to jail, than die in a nursing home?”

“No Cuts! No Caps!”

These statements were just some of the many chants that were commonly used to encourage legislators and their respective voters to not repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) this past summer. They probably sound familiar whether you're a part of the disability community or an avid viewer of The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC.

From calls, handwritten letters, emails – to direct nonviolent civil rights disobedience, the disability community came together, nationwide, to educate as many as possible on the vital proposed changes.

You may have seen that our efforts were productive. On Tuesday, July 25th, the US Senate Republicans were astonished – to say the least – with a plot twist during the vote. The US Senate Democrats, already against the repeal and replacement of ACA, were accompanied by Republican Senators Susan Collins, John McCain and Lisa Murkowski. The final vote was enough to not pass the proposed bill.

Being just under 30 years old and a person with significant physical disability, I am proud to share my experience of advocating with the renowned grassroots organization for the civil and human rights of people with disabilities – ADAPT. Every year, for the last three years, I've participated in the National Council on Independent Living's annual conference. Each time, and throughout my time within the Independent Living Movement, I had heard many great things about ADAPT. Not just their accomplishments, but the exhilarating feelings brought by being amongst the community of disability rights activists.

I always thought, “I have to be a part of that. Those issues affect me directly, and my disability community siblings who cannot be a part of such activities.” But, money, as many can probably relate, got in my way. Until, the July action of 2017. “Do you want to get arrested?” Many had asked me that, following with a rundown of what to expect from this experience. I didn’t even know if I was ready for this – my first ADAPT action. But I felt as though this was finally my chance! So I went for it. My anxiety from hardly knowing anyone, and being a novice ADAPTER, had dissolved.

Entering the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, DC, I simply followed suit. I tried joining familiar faces. Before I could, I was met by a veteran in the ADAPT world who immediately invited me to join them. And from there, my adrenaline started to rush!

Things quickly escalated. From finding friends to being given the ADAPT protocol for when law enforcement might intervene – all while advocating against the proposed healthcare bill. Leaving the nonviolent protest under arrest meant more than just paying a \$50 fine, it meant I’d experienced camaraderie like never before.

I’m not going to get further into the action, but I would like to address the importance of participating within our chosen communities. The disability community is known as the largest minority. How well-known is it though? Disability doesn’t discriminate on any account (age, race, gender [identity], socio-economic status, etc.) The basic human rights – that advocates have fought for and continue to fight for – will serve people in the short and long-term.

The future is often correlated with advance-ments in technology; more specifically the Internet. This is where young people come in. So many folks might be interested in participating in advocacy efforts, but don't actually want to be on the "front line." Plot twist! The front line isn't just a physical space. There are many leadership opportunities that can take place from your home or local community.

Our involvement in advocacy, especially as young people, is imperative. We are seen as creative individuals able to keep up with virtual advancements in the social justice movements – which oftentimes initiate face-to-face interactions. And, there is always room at the table for those who are genuinely passionate about the main objective: equal access for all.

Parker Glick is a self-advocate who works at the State Independent Living Council in Decatur, GA. Glick is also a member of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities.

PUBLIC POLICY FOR THE PEOPLE

by Dawn Alford and Hanna Rosenfeld

The fall of 2017 was dedicated to advocating for Medicaid. The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) joined other agencies, organizations, nonprofits and advocates to launch the No Cuts! No Caps! Campaign to bring attention to the dangers present for Georgians with disabilities in many of the healthcare proposals being discussed in the US Senate.

As GCDD's Executive Director Eric Jacobson shared in the Fall edition of Making a Difference magazine, "advocacy is the most important and effective way to get your voice heard." This proved true across the nation as Georgians with disabilities joined the many voices rising across our great country to educate lawmakers on the dangers of cutting \$800 billion from Medicaid. With all of your help, we were rewarded with the US Senate's failure to pass the "Skinny Repeal" before their August recess.

Unfortunately, the fight resumed in September when the US Senate proposed yet another damaging healthcare bill that would be harmful to people with disabilities. The Graham-Cassidy Bill, sponsored by Senators Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), Bill Cassidy (R-Louisiana), Dean Heller (R-Nevada) and Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), once again, included massive cuts to Medicaid and rolled back many consumer protections granted in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Thankfully, the advocacy of so many paid off and the Senate decided not to vote on this bill. While it is unclear at this time what the future may hold, it is clear that the desire for healthcare change is real and not going away any time soon. The need to advocate and raise our voices continues to be strong as we guard against any potential changes that would harm people with disabilities. As we prepare for future fights, we must learn from our past experiences. We now know that few elected officials or members of the general public understand the Medicaid program and who it serves. For example, many do not realize the difference between Medicaid "expansion" through the ACA which Georgia chose not to take, and traditional Medicaid,

which has been around for more than 50 years and funds the home and community based services upon which so many people with disabilities rely. This contributed to the false security that people with disabilities felt, believing that their form of Medicaid would somehow be protected from the cuts being proposed. In collaboration with many partners across the State and the nation, GCDD was reminded of the need to continually educate our advocates and communities. As long as Medicaid continues to be the lifeline to the community for people with disabilities, we at the GCDD will continue to educate and advocate for its survival.

Along with Medicaid advocacy, September was the month of hurricanes. These natural disasters reminded us that people with disabilities must advocate for themselves by speaking with their caregivers, family members and other trusted supports to develop a personal emergency plan for any kind of emergency they might face. They must also engage with community officials and ensure that they have incorporated the needs of people with disabilities into their disaster planning efforts. Read on as guest writer, Laura George, tells us more about how to prepare for emergencies.

Dawn Alford is the GCDD Public Policy Director.

Hanna Rosenfeld is the GCDD Planning and Policy Development Specialist.

EMERGENCY PLANNING DESIGN

by Laura George

The most important thing that a person can do for an impending disaster is to become informed on how they will live, survive and move forward after the event. When discussing Emergency Preparedness, it is best to consider it Emergency Planning Design because the topic includes planning before, during and after the disaster. Furthermore, a plan must be designed to ensure that you can live at least three to seven days after a disaster with no support.

Remember “YO-YO” (You are On Your Own) in a disaster! Creating your emergency design plan may seem overwhelming. However, working on it step by step ensures its current relevancy to your life and will ensure your safety through a disaster.

For people with disabilities, preparation doesn't just include water, food and batteries. It also includes access to medications, tools/technologies, caregivers/provider agencies, spare medical supplies/hardware, transportation and safe, accessible refuge to maintain independent living. Look to your state's resources on emergency planning. Then, look to your county of residence for local resource agencies, websites, social media platforms and other disability advocacy organizations or support groups.

After completing your research, decide on three locations for safe refuge:

- I One for staying in place.
- I One for leaving your residence.
- I One for if the first two fall through or are not an option.

Your prepared “Go Kit” should have the above-mentioned basics along with items that everyone in your household,

including any service animals and pets, would need. A weather radio, manual can opener, First Aid kit, local maps, flashlights and batteries are also helpful. Equally important is a document in your kit that lists important contacts and your medical health information (e.g., details such as if you have any implanted devices, the need for an interpreter for communication with others and dietary concerns).

Now, congratulate yourself because you have completed most of your Emergency Planning Design! However, after researching your local community's resources, you've likely found some unanswered questions. Find your voice! You are 100% responsible for your personal plan until you have questions. Then your community shares responsibility to help you find the answers.

Contact your local police, fire, health department and emergency management agencies for the additional solutions you need. Ask about their emergency planning committees. Remember, you are not the only one with a unique concern. First responders are genuinely interested in learning about people with disabilities and how to work us into their emergency plan for the community. Consider volunteering on Emergency Preparedness committees and other organizations. Be alert!

Be prepared!

Be safe!

Georgia Emergency Preparedness Resources:

| [Ready Georgia](#)

| [Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency \(GEMA\)](#)

| [Georgia Department of Public Health](#)

Disability Specific Resources:

| [Georgia Emergency Preparedness Coalition for Individuals with Disabilities and Older Adults](#)

| [Independent Living Centers](#)

| [Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](#)

| [Smart Response](#)

| [Pass It On Center](#)

| [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

| [The Right To Be Rescued: Disability Justice in an Age of Disaster](#)

| [What to pack for people with disabilities in emergencies](#)

| [Searchable database of videos with multiple language captions and ASL](#)

Volunteering Opportunities:

| [Community Emergency Response Teams/CERT](#)

| [Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster \(VOAD\) groups](#)

Laura George sits on the Emergency Preparedness Committee for the National Council on Independent Living and is the Program Director of Emergency Preparedness for Access and Functional Needs at Noah's Ark and Company, Inc. She is also an author, presenter and caregiver. Laura George is pictured with her daughter.

FEATURE STORY 1

Growing Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

by RJ Moshay

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The campaign is led by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, but its true spirit lies in the many observances held at the grassroots level across the nation every year.

Great strides are being made around the country and across the State to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce through entrepreneurship and self-employment. In America, being employed and working are very important to everyone's self-esteem and long-term financial independence – this is particularly true in the disability community.

“When you have a job, you have a continuous source of feedback that you are a contributing member of society,” said psychotherapist Charles Allen in an article in USA Today. “That’s not to say you go to work thinking, ‘Hey, I’m a valued member of society.’ The idea is largely subconscious. You feel it in the depths of your brain.”

“Being employed helps you feel wanted and that you’re contributing to your finances,” adds psychotherapist Elizabeth Lombardo in the same article. “It gives you social support.” These statements from the mental health community echo the sentiment of the Employment First movement and those of US Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta in explaining this year’s theme, Inclusion Drives Innovation.

“Americans of all abilities must have access to good, safe jobs,” Acosta said in the news release announcing the theme. “Smart employers know that including different perspectives in problem-solving situations leads to better solutions. Hiring employees with diverse abilities strengthens business, increases competition and drives innovation.”

As Jenny Stonemeier, interim executive director for the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) shares, inclusion is not limited to proper supports for people with disabilities.

“It’s a holistic approach towards making a business more engaged across the board,” Stonemeier said. “Inclusion Drives Innovation means I can be more responsive not only to my employees but, to my stakeholders, board, vendors, etc.”

While everyone touts the benefits of work, many in the disability community have historically been concerned about the impact employment would have on their Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Income (SSI/SSDI) benefits and resources. Though each case is unique, these concerns have been somewhat mitigated by the advent of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act and The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Home and Community-Based Waiver Services (HCBS) Settings rule.

With the changing tide of federal laws and some state provisions, many are more rapidly exploring options outside of sheltered employment and moving into more competitive and integrated work environments, one of the hallmarks of Employment First. Still others, with the help of various federal,

state and nonprofit entities, are jumping into the uncharted waters of entrepreneurship and self-employment.

The perfect storm of the seismic changes in the global business arena, coupled with advances in technology has increased the attractiveness and practicality of entrepreneurship for many people, including individuals with disabilities.

Per the US Small Business Administration (SBA), individuals with disabilities who are participating in the labor market have a higher rate of interest in pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship. According to the US Census Bureau, individuals with disabilities are twice as likely to be self-employed as the general population, 14.7% compared to 8%.

Sowing the Seeds for Entrepreneurial Success

The lack of access to capital, quality mentors and sound business counsel can be barriers to entrepreneurship, and these can be exacerbated for the disability community.

Fortunately, traditional public service providers such as vocational rehabilitation (VR) and small business development professionals are working with nonprofits, the private sector and non-traditional resources such as micro enterprises and microboard organizations to advance entrepreneurship as a viable and flexible route to economic independence.

“The businesses that grow and stay are the ones that get technical assistance, support and training who understand the financial opportunities of business,” said Elizabeth Wilson, executive director of the Georgia Micro Enterprises Network (GMEN), a nonprofit that supports and funds viable micro-businesses in Georgia.

VR, behavioral health and community services professionals, people with disabilities and their families recently attended SOAR: A Pathway to Self-Employment seminar at the All About Developmental Disabilities (AADD) Family Support Center in Decatur, Georgia.

The seminar was hosted by two nonprofits, Synergies Work, Inc., that focuses on financial independence through entrepreneurship and Georgia Microboards Association (GMA), that provides technical assistance to people with disabilities and their families. The one-day seminar provided attendees an opportunity to learn how to successfully become self-employed. Seminar topics included business networking, managing benefits and building good credit.

“We are coordinating and collaborating with organizations to see how we can bring in the financial resources for people to take the next jump forward in starting a business,” said Aarti Sahgal, founder of Synergies Work.

Ryan Johnson, executive director of GMA, stresses the importance of goal setting in achieving entrepreneurial success. “It’s important that your goals represent what you want. We start at the biggest goal that we can, then we break that down into small manageable pieces and then progress to making those goals a reality,” he said.

Along with goal setting, understanding the nuances of financing and accessing capital plays a huge role in economic viability for entrepreneurs. Over the past few months, the US Small Business Administration and the University of Georgia – Athens Small Business Development Center (UGA SBDC) hosted The Credit School at five metro Atlanta locations. Sponsored by PNC

Bank, the full-day intensive boot camp specifically designed for minorities, women, veterans and people with disabilities (but open to all business owners) provides startups and small business owners an exclusive opportunity to learn from experts who have already helped thousands secure business loans. The Credit School participants walk away with a better understanding of:

- | What SBA loans are, how they work and how to get one.
- | The impact of negative personal credit and what you can do about it.
- | How bankers think and why it matters.
- | How other small business owners successfully got funded.
- | Commercial bankers, SBA lenders, and certified development companies.

To address concerns of how entrepreneurial endeavors can impact SSI/SSDI benefits, Sally Atwell and Curtis Rodgers, who both work in the Benefits Navigator Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, highlighted the importance of how Social Security views income called Net Earnings through Self-Employment (NESE) and how that income affects eligibility for benefits.

“The most important thing I can tell you about being self-employed is record keeping,” said Rodgers. “The need for accurate accounting when it comes to Social Security and the IRS is crucial.”

Atwell agreed that, “Record keeping, reporting and tax returns – those are the keys if self-employment is your goal.”

While accurate finances are important to building a strong business, so is developing a robust network. Ashish Thakur,

executive director of the Atlanta CEO Council, a relationship-driven nonprofit dedicated to helping executive leaders build trusted and long-lasting relationships, supports the necessity of building a human network.

Reaping the Rewards

Hundreds of individuals in the State of Georgia have sown the seeds of success by accessing the necessary training, mentoring and resources to reap the financial rewards and self-sufficiency derived from entrepreneurship and self-employment. Synergies Work has helped a number of entrepreneurs with disabilities pursue their dreams in such varied capacities as coffee cafes and the visual arts.

In addition, here are several examples of other Georgia entrepreneurs.

Born three months premature, Portsmouth, VA native VaShaun Jones, 41, has been unstoppable from day one. Despite having some level of low vision since birth, the now Atlanta-based affable and enterprising former MCI/WorldCom executive has always had to hustle since boyhood days as a newspaper carrier and a subscription payment collector.

Those days as a newspaper carrier focused on customer service and collection set the stage for Jones' successful career in collections and customer service at large corporate entities and law firms. However, a detached retina, diabetes and various conditions related to his premature birth led to gradual loss of sight and complete blindness at age 30.

"All my life, I had lived and worked in a sighted world, and responded accordingly," Jones said, who has learned how to

walk with a cane. “I was living the same life, but, now, ‘in the dark.’”

Having not been a part of the disability system, he was unaware of the various resources available, found himself out of a job, and ultimately, homeless. With the help of friends, he was able to connect with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and secure a counselor.

Concurrent to his work with the GVRA, he began accessibility testing for Apple and discovered he had a knack for computers and was good at instructing others. He saw a niche for a business opportunity, and he took his knowledge from the corporate world, and from launching three businesses pre-total blindness, to develop a path for entrepreneurship in his new reality.

Jones availed himself of the requisite courses and trainings outlined by the GVRA to developed a business plan with input from the SBDC and SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives). In December 2012, Jones’ GVRA case was closed and he reports that he was the first individual to have a case closed in the entrepreneurial track.

The GVRA helped Jones set up his business, Fedora Outlier, LLC, outfitting him with new Apple computers, phones and studio equipment necessary for virtual/online learning. Jones’ company name is inspired by his love of hats and one of his favorite business tomes, Malcolm Gladwell’s *Outliers: The Story of Success*.

Jones has come a long way from post-blindness homelessness and his five-year odyssey of adjusting to his new life. Fedora Outlier now boasts over \$1 million in revenue, with a global

team of 32 employees based in locales such as the US, Japan, Canada and Barbados.

A believer in diversification, in addition to individual clients who are blind, Jones also works with the Department of Education, the GVRA and the Veterans Administration (VA). What's more is that all of Jones' employees are either blind or have low vision.

In encouraging others to engage in advocacy, Jones advises members of the disability community to get to know their legislative representatives, and to build a relationship with the State Rehabilitation Council as it's "our voice of the consumer."

Jones is excited about this year's NDEAM theme, Inclusion Drives Innovation. As to how he sees the theme playing out, he advises, "Include us, the disability community, in the problems as well as in identifying the solutions. That drives innovation."

"Budding" Entrepreneurs

For those who find Fedora Outlier too heady for their liking, Athens-based Good Roots provides a more "terra firma" training ground for "budding" entrepreneurs.

A program of independent living center Multiple Choices, Good Roots is a micro enterprise training and production program for isolated individuals. Isolation can be based on many factors, including disability, but the result is often the same – poverty, limited resources and lack of opportunity.

Good Roots trainees learn the art and science of growing seedlings, and the rudiments of small business ownership, while contributing to their local communities through the production and sale of quality organically grown vegetable, herb and flower seedlings.

“We help people sow and grow,” said UGA-trained botanist and Good Roots coordinator Stephanie Bergamo. “We’ve watched people come here, learn to work with their seedlings and others, and just blossom in the process.”

Good Roots trainees use the monies made from seedling sales to supplement their income and have a sense of ownership.

Trainees use their earnings to purchase bicycles or computers to further their educational and/or vocational pursuits.

Sheronda Kessler, a Good Roots trainee, has been making dolls for 15 years. Her dolls become book buddies, outfitted in majestic regalia, armed with a storybook and ready to take on the world. Kessler combined her love of dolls and storytelling with the training she received at Good Roots to secure income to further her studies in Early Childhood Education at Athens Technical College.

For Everything, There
is a Season...

The season for inclusion is now. “Approaching any realm of life – personally, professionally, recreationally – with an inclusive frame of mind, stimulates one to think outside of the box, that is, to innovate,” added Bergamo.

Entrepreneur Resources

| www.askjan.org/— Information about self-employment and starting a business from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a free service of ODEP.

| www.sba.gov/— Federal agency that provides assistance to current and prospective small business owners.

| www.ncwd-youth.info/road-to-self-sufficiency/ — Road to

Self-Sufficiency: A Guide to Entrepreneurship for Youth with Disabilities — ODEP-funded guide that shows how entrepreneurship education can be implemented and offers suggestions on how to introduce self-employment as an option for all youth, including youth with disabilities.

| www.usa.gov/start-business— Information on starting and growing a business.

| www.score.org/— Resource for finding a small business mentor.

| www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/article/self-employment-what-to-know-to-be-your-own-boss.htm— Information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics on self-employment.

| www.synergieswork.org/

| www.multiplechoices.us/programs.html—Good Roots program at Multiple Choices, Inc.

EXPERT UPDATE

Ron Wakefield Speaks to the Georgia Council

This is an excerpt from Ron Wakefield's, director of DBHDD's Division of Developmental Disabilities, talk at GCDD's July Council meeting.

Of all the things I've done in my four months, this is probably one of the most exciting things for me. I've been waiting for an opportunity to get in front of families and advocates. Providers

across the State absolutely know who I am because they get an opportunity to see me frequently and often. One of the things that has always been on my heart is, 'we're all doing this for who?'

We're doing this for you, for your loved ones, for your sons, for your daughters and for those receiving services. So, it's always important as a state entity to be able to connect directly with you.

Our department has a vision statement and it really talks about our ability to ensure that we have easy access to our services and to ensure that we have quality services for all. Whatever we do as an organization, that's what it should focus on.

In terms of the department, we've had forums especially for the rollout of new waivers. My department went all over the State before we rewrote the NOW and COMP waivers. We spoke to folks, families, individuals and got ideas and suggestions for what should be in the waivers going forward. As I think of a family unit, you face so many hurdles, especially if you have a child with a disability – no matter what that disability is. From day one, you're facing an uphill battle. You're facing all kinds of challenges that constantly come at you. I look at your day. Your day is far different from mine. I don't have a child with a disability. But your day, you wake up, you think about that. In fact some of you think about that during the night because you've got to get up and you've got to do some things with your child. So, that's constantly your world.

As a state person, I need to understand that. I need to see life through your perspective. Because what you're experiencing or what you're dealing with on a daily basis is far different from

what I'm dealing with. The bottom line for me is this – we're here for you. So when we craft policy, etc. that has to be at the forefront of our minds.

I'll admit sometimes when you're in town or downtown and you look out the window, you see life from a different perspective. We still need to remain grounded in what's relevant and what's important and that we can get directly from you. I hope you kind of understand why this is so exciting for me to be here, to see you, for you to be able to see me.

I've heard from families who are facing the issues that I talked about earlier. That's daily life for them. When you try to reach out to get some help, what do you get? You get everything but the right person or the right answers that you need. That's a priority for me. That's something that needs to change. We need to create an environment in which we, as state employees, recognize that we're here for you.

Does that mean we're going to solve your problem? No. Does that mean you're going to get everything you want? No. But, it does mean that we're working with you on trying to find a solution or resolution. So, that's one of the things that's very important to me.

There are some things that we're involved in now and I'll go through some. Some of you may have heard about some of this already. Some people may not have. We are looking at our website as a department overall and we have created a number of changes for the sake of bettering the way that we do business. The very purpose of that is to ensure again that we're responsive and we're keeping our stakeholders in mind.

We looked at the various service lines and ways we interact with individuals and families. For DBHDD, an important aspect of that is support coordination.

Last July, we learned from people who were transitioning from the hospitals. We learned that if it works really well for a smaller group and that it is something important, we want to make sure the larger group of individuals receiving services also are a part of the good things. So that's also driving the way we change our system.

Then we changed support coordination. We invited other agencies to come and join Georgia in our work because we wanted to provide oversight and follow up and advocate for individuals who are most at risk within our population. For those individuals who have high medical or high behavioral needs, we need to ensure that we're partnering in a different way to ensure that the outcomes that are meant for them are really positive.

The next change was clinical oversight. You may hear words like "surveillance" and all that. It's not what you think it is. We're not trying to spy on anybody. We created a new department two years ago – the Department of Health and Wellness – which made a tremendous difference in the population of individuals transitioning from a state hospital.

What we want them to recognize is you. Raise your hand for some aid and assistance. We're no longer expecting you as a provider or caregiver to go find all the solutions yourself. We recognize that there are some things that you cannot do by yourself – intensive support, coordination support, coordination. As a state department, we're going to work

alongside you to try and resolve some of those issues that are barriers to the health of your sons and daughters.

I confess – we have made the system complicated. I don't think I've ever seen as many processes and steps as I've seen now. There is a group right now that is trying to look at all our policies. We have policies here, we have policies there, and we need to make sure that they match. That's the kind of work we need to do. That's the kind of laser vision I want us to have internally to look at everything.

There are certain changes that will happen from time to time because we're trying to provide easy access. We're trying to simplify our processes, so it's not so complex to you as a family, and it's not so complex to others in the community. It's transparent, you get it, you get what we're trying to ask for and you get exactly what you're looking for.

I've talked about partnership a lot. So, it obligates me even more to ensure that as we go forward, we do work in partnership because there are some things that sometimes it takes more than one of us to resolve.

Again, this is not about us trying to dictate what life should look like for you. There are certain changes we can make on a system-wide level that as a family, as an individual receiving services, can benefit a larger group.

To view the videos of Director Ron Wakefield's entire speech to the GCDD, click on the links below:

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

Ron Wakefield is the director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).

FEATURE STORY 2

APSE Focuses on Integrated Competitive Employment Climate By RJ Moshay

Changes are on the horizon in Employment First, and the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) stands ready to help navigate these uncharted waters at its upcoming two-day regional institute in Atlanta, November 2-3, 2017, at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta Midtown.

For the third time, APSE is hosting its annual Regional Institute in partnership with the Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and its Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program (EFSLMP).

To learn more about the organization while gaining perspective on how its conference will demystify the nuances of competitive integrated employment, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) recently visited with Jenny Stonemeier, interim executive director of Maryland-based APSE.

Untapped Employment Market

Based on ODEP's framework for organizational transformation, APSE designed this year's institute to help disability services providers build their capacity for supported employment with

the goal of serving individuals with disabilities in competitive integrated jobs in their communities.

With a significant focus on organizational change, participants will have an opportunity to engage with subject matter experts as well as business leaders who have successfully transformed their models from segregated settings to integrated settings, resulting in real work for real pay.

As the only national membership association focused on exclusively on integrated employment, APSE's theme for the institute is "Organizational Change: From Workshops to Workplaces."

"This conference is a place where leaders, who understand organizational change as necessary, will come together to learn from those who have already transformed their organizations," said Stonemeier.

Sessions and information provided will be geared towards all of those who are a part of organization transformation. The targeted audience includes: people with disabilities who receive services and their family members; direct service workers; mid to upper level management; CEOs and CFOs and board members.

Organizational Change

But, there is a bigger goal at hand. Only 34.7% of people aged 16 – 64 with disabilities are employed. Nationwide, there are 56.7 million people with disabilities in the US, per the 2010 Census. This is unacceptable to APSE and other proponents of Employment First.

A key tenet in APSE's purpose is to further the Employment First principle where employment is the first and preferred

outcome in the provision of publicly-funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability.

The Employment First movement is gaining more traction than ever. Federal laws, regulations and funding shifts have changed the landscape of public supports and services for individuals with disabilities.

The Regional Institute will be laser-focused on several of these policy and federal law shifts including:

- I The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, allowing individuals and families to open tax-free savings accounts to maintain health, independence and quality of life without the fear of losing SSI and Medicaid benefits.

- I Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), providing increased opportunity for youth with disabilities to be supported in competitive integrated employment. WIOA also has the potential to limit the use of sub-minimum wages.

- I The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Home and Community-Based Waiver Services (HCBS) Settings rule requiring individuals to have opportunities to seek employment, work in competitive integrated settings, and engage in community life.

This year's Regional Institute is slightly different from previous gatherings in that the focus is on the preparedness of each attendee's organization for change and developing a specific plan for success.

From organizational to departmental to team and workforce structure, these two days will enable participants to work directly with subject matter experts and leave the event with a

specific plan for how to implement organizational change. There will be more time to network and work on plans with hands-on support from presenters.

These changes facilitate the transformation from a congregate service delivery model to integrated and community-based employment services, but with this, comes “pain points of how to implement,” Stonemeier shared. “There is an investment of will and capital, both human and financial, to produce change.” All sessions will be general so attendees can collaborate with peer organizations as well as organizational experts. Attendees will leave with a roadmap for organizational success.

The institute will kick off with an opening keynote address from GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson and Council member Evan Nodvin, followed by two days of hands-on interaction with subject matter experts regarding best practices in change management, from stakeholder engagement to having the right team in place to execute.

A highlight of the conference will be a panel of Georgia-area self-advocates who work in competitive integrated employment. The Institute will conclude with a keynote from Doug Crandell, from the College of Family and Consumer Services at University of Georgia.

“We want our attendees to walk away with a ‘rock solid’ plan for implementing change first thing Monday morning,” Stonemeier said. “A step-by-step, stage-by-stage plan to address the necessary changes to reach the goals. The plan will start with a vision for change, the phases of change, the steps necessary within each of those phases, the team members involved, the outcome measures, and definitions of success.”

APSE's Focus

Founded nearly 30 years ago, APSE reports that it is the only national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

APSE is a 3,000+ and growing national nonprofit membership organization. With chapters in 38 states and the District of Columbia, APSE's membership roster includes individuals with disabilities, families, disability professionals and businesses that come from all 50 states and Puerto Rico, as well as several foreign countries.

Through advocacy and education, APSE leads the charge in advancing employment and self-sufficiency for all people with disabilities.

Visit apse.org/2017regionalinstitute/ for an in-depth look at the agenda for the 2017 Regional Institute.

APSE REGIONAL INSTITUTE ATTENDEE BREAKDOWN

- | 41% Director of Employment Services
 - | 14% Executive Director
 - | 11% Developmental Disability Agency Personnel
 - | 9% Direct Service Personnel
 - | 7% Family Members and Individuals with Disabilities
 - | 9% Disability Employment Services Agency Leadership
(senior managers, board of director)
 - | 2% Mental Health Agency representative
 - | 7% other
- | To learn more about APSE, visit apse.org/

I For a comprehensive listing of Employment First tools and resources nationwide, visit the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) site at www.selnhub.org/

GEORGIA EMPLOYMENT FIRST RESOURCES

I [APSE Georgia](#)

I [Georgia Legislative Report](#) – Georgia Legislative report on employment of individuals with I/DD recommending creating an Employment First Advisory Council

I [Georgia Legislation Establishing Study Committee \(2015\)](#) – Legislation Establishing House Committee to examine options for an Employment First policy

I [University of Georgia’s Institute on Human Development and Disability \(IHDD\)](#)

I [GCDD Statement Calling for an Employment First policy](#)

I [Employment 1st Across the Nation \(MAP\)](#)

MIA’S SPACE

Wake-up Call

By Pat Nobbie, PhD, Mia’s mom

We got an employment wake-up call this month. It came with the angst that anyone’s reality adjustment might come with, plus some.

I have written before about Mia’s snack adventures, and how she figured out how to use her hospital personnel badge in the cafeteria to buy food. Recently she took this to a new level, and

I found out about it from one of the nurses. She was behind Mia at the cashier and observed Mia spending \$15 dollars on biscuits, bacon, a coke, a honey bun, etc. Mia's response to a friendly inquiry was that she had no food at home.

I soon found out that Mia has been clocking in on her floor, going to the cafeteria and settling in for a nice long breakfast of not-good-for-you things, and then going back to her floor, 20 minutes late. And telling the nurses that Fabersha, who takes her to work some days, (not all!) had a flat tire, had a fire in her car, got stopped by the police and other excuses that would result in making her late.

When I heard all this, my heart plummeted and I feared Mia would lose the job she loves.

I had conversations with Mia's people, the nursing staff and the job coach. Mia denied everything. I have always said Mia is smart enough to be manipulative. She wound everyone up with her stories and they felt bad for her – and maybe let her get away with things that they would never tolerate from other workers. But, in that behavior is communication. So, what was she telling us?

I wrote to the nursing staff to reassure them that Mia has plenty of food in her apartment, goes grocery shopping every week and eats family dinner with the Whitakers or Fabersha. And, Fabersha does not have three flat tires and law enforcement encounters every month. I share my perspective that Mia is an adult who figured out how to get cafeteria time in a way that is within her ability. But, she needs to be held accountable for her work behavior just like any other employee.

The next morning, Mia got suspended from work for two days. Fabersha picked her up at the hospital. Mia was crying in the car when they called me back. I conferred with hospital staff, Mia's people and the job coach. We found out she feels bored in her new office where she is not the center of the nurse's station, listens to music on her phone, which is distracting, so she's not getting her work done. She needs her phone to signal breaks, lunch and when to pack up so she doesn't miss the bus. We got her a digital clock. We changed her morning routine, so someone is there to make sure she eats a good breakfast, and walks her into the floor instead of dropping her off like before. She liked taking the bus, but this gave her the freedom to abuse the cafeteria. So for now, she's getting a ride to work every day. I think she was also telling me she misses me, and this incident got my attention. The family she lives with reassures me it's not that. But I made plans to get down there a few more times before Christmas when we will be together and this seemed to reassure her.

She went back to work after her suspension, apologized to her supervisor, and got down to business. She had a night out with her friends, had a girlfriend spend the night, and life righted itself. On the next few calls, she sounds happy and energized. Stuff happens, same as anyone. The "plus-some" is our reality of how much harder it is for life to right itself for our folks. It doesn't take much for everything a family has constructed for their person who needs support to totally fall apart, and these crashes affect a wide circle of people. We are lucky. Every individual should be so lucky. But, we have to communicate this

to the people who say they represent us so life's wake-up calls don't undo all we have worked for.

FEATURE STORY 3

Saving Georgia's Council on Developmental Disabilities

By Adina Solomon

For more than four decades, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) has advocated for people with developmental disabilities and acted as a liaison between them and state leaders.

Today, the Council is made up of a 24-member board appointed by Governor Nathan Deal; and it represents about 158,000 Georgians with developmental disabilities in issues including education, employment and direct care.

"We are really in a unique space to be able to, without having any conflict of interest, really find out what people with disabilities and their families really need and want and are able to help give them a voice in a way that other organizations may not be able to do," said Dawn Alford, Public Policy Director at GCDD.

But that mission could be under threat.

The History

The history of Developmental Disability (DD) Councils began in 1961, when a presidential panel found that state-run institutional facilities were often underfunded, and systemic abuse and neglect was a problem. In response to these findings, President John F. Kennedy proposed legislation to Congress

that eventually became the Maternal and Child Health and Mental Retardation Planning Amendments of 1963.

The act was amended in 1970 as the Developmental Disabilities Services and Facilities Construction Amendments, which introduced the term “developmental disability” and created the state DD Councils. Georgia’s council began in 1971. Under the current DD Act of 2000, developmental disability is defined as a severe, chronic disability that is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, manifested before the age of 22, is likely to continue indefinitely and has functional limitations on life activities such as learning and mobility.

“DD Councils bring together the state government, individuals with disabilities, their families, professionals and foundations,” said Donna Meltzer, CEO of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) in Washington, DC.

“It’s really everybody coming together to say, ‘OK, let’s identify what our issue is, what is not working perhaps in our state or territory,’” she added.

New Concerns

In the current proposed federal budget by President Donald Trump, there are cuts to the US and its territories’ 55 DD Councils. Learning of this, councils began advocating for a fully funded budget in Fiscal Year 2019.

All DD Councils are funded by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), part of the US Department of Health and Human Services. State DD Councils received \$73 million in the fiscal year 2017 budget. The president’s proposed budget calls for combining funding from three organizations: the State

Council on DD, Part B Independent Living funding and Traumatic Brain Injury funding.

The single fund would be called the Partnerships for Innovation, Inclusion and Independence (P3I), and would receive \$45 million in 2019. That is a 55.8% cut from the three organizations' combined 2017 funding.

"To think that you can now combine three very different programs, ask them to address very real needs in states and territories, adhere to a high level of accountability and transparency, etc., and do that for \$45 million is just not possible," Meltzer said. "It means nobody will be served."

Meltzer added that NACDD opposes the concept of P3I. She stressed that this proposal is in the President's budget, not the official one from Congress.

Why Councils Matter

Nearly one in five people in the US has a disability. Of those 56 million Americans with a disability under the definition of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), about five million people have developmental disabilities, Meltzer said.

"It's very important that the Council is there and really focusing in on those needs, which I always fear could get lost if we're only all about the bigger disability picture," she added. "It's really bringing that focus and attention to a very specific set of needs within the bigger disability population."

Council members need to be representative of the state population and in all councils, 60% must either be people with developmental disabilities or their family members.

DD Councils exist so people with developmental disabilities can have full access to the community.

GCDD advocates at the Georgia General Assembly to make Medicaid support more home care. Medicaid is biased to providing institutional care, which comes at a higher cost to taxpayers and disrupts the lives of people who require care. Most people want to receive care at home so they can be part of the community and go to school or work, Alford said. “Think about it. Would you want to live in an institutional setting?” she asked. “When I ask that to people, I’ve never met anyone who’s raised their hand to say, ‘Oh yes, I would love to go live in a nursing facility.’”

Under the current system, there is a waiting list for waivers to pay for home care. In Georgia, that list has almost 9,000 people with developmental disabilities. GCDD advocates for funding to reduce and eventually eliminate the waiting list.

“We don’t want people to have to wait for services,” Alford said.

Additionally, some of the biggest issues that councils address and advocate for are employment, education and healthcare, especially the future of Medicaid – a lifeline for people with disabilities.

A Council’s Impact

Each council has goals built into a five-year state plan. For GCDD’s 2017-2021 plan, the goals are education, employment, formal and informal supports, real communities and self-advocacy.

Initiatives stem from there. In 2010, GCDD launched the Real Communities Partnerships, which involves people with and without developmental disabilities in collaborative projects to support more communities inclusive of people with disabilities.

The Council supports Project SEARCH, a business-led, high school-to-work transition program that serves students with developmental disabilities. It happens at the workplace, and the goal for each student is year-round employment alongside coworkers. So far, GCDD has sponsored 29 Project SEARCH worksites.

The program has led to a 75% employment rate, \$9.61 average wage per hour and 25 hours worked per week on average.

For its education goal, GCDD advocates for inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) programs, which are dedicated to ensuring that every Georgia student has access to learning after high school, regardless of intellectual or developmental disability. The five-year plan wants to expand the programs to 15 universities and colleges by 2021.

GCDD has already supported the creation of programs at seven colleges and universities including University of Georgia, Georgia Tech and Georgia State University. Results are positive. Just 16% of adults with disabilities overall have employment, but those who graduated from IPSE programs have reached 40%.

GCDD also sponsors events, trainings and workshops around the State to grow workforce proficiency, supporting people with disabilities to live increasingly independent lives.

Supporting Georgia

GCDD's success has been possible due to partnerships and relationships with key decision makers and Georgia policymakers. Not only has Governor Deal spoken at the GCDD-sponsored Disability Day events at the Georgia Capitol, but he has also supported many programs such as IPSE and the latest,

Georgia STABLE program. In June, he launched Georgia STABLE, a tax-free savings program for eligible individuals with disabilities. The program is administered by the Georgia Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program Corporation, which was established through the Georgia ABLE Act of 2016. State Rep. Katie Dempsey (R-District 13) was a sponsor of the ABLE Act. It allows eligible people to save and invest up to \$14,000 a year.

“I am grateful that Georgia’s DD Council serves as a voice for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, representing approximately 158,000 Georgians with developmental disabilities,” Dempsey said in an email statement.

“Through public policy advocacy and successful programs, GCDD has helped countless Georgians with developmental disabilities thrive in their communities. All who call Georgia home should have the opportunity to live full and active lives, and GCDD helps every person living with developmental disabilities to set goals and reach their highest potential,” she added.

State Sen. Butch Miller (R-District 49) has supported efforts such as inclusive post-secondary education programs.

“Federal funding for developmental disabilities is close to my heart. Millions of families, including my own, are impacted by developmental disabilities. In 2014, Georgia was the only state with autism and developmental disabilities monitoring network sites,” Miller said in an email statement. “To reduce or eliminate research funding and care for children with

developmental disabilities would be a shame and a disgrace. We are better than that.”

How Federal Cuts Would Affect Councils

Though DD Councils don’t provide direct services to people with disabilities, they advocate for issues that other organizations cannot, Alford said.

“That’s an important part of what we do. Not just connecting families and people with disabilities with their state leaders, but connecting other organizations together that are working on similar things,” she said. “I think of us a lot of times as kind of like that glue or link between different entities to put the whole picture together in a unique way that others might not be able to do.”

At the time of this writing both the US House and Senate have passed appropriations bills that would fund DD Councils at \$73 million. This is level funding based on last year. Additionally, there was language in both House and Senate bills saying that Congress does not support the creation of the P3I.

Meltzer added, “To the best of my knowledge, based on phone calls with ACL/AIDD (Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities) leadership, ACL is no longer pursuing the P3I proposal as Congress and stakeholders in the disability community have communicated their opposition. We do not expect to see this proposal in the President’s FY 2019 budget which is expected to be sent to Congress in early February.”

Sen. Miller added that federal funding is paramount to carrying out GCDD’s work.

“GCDD requires and deserves proper funding to promote public policy that benefits those in need,” he said. “Families are often unable to care and support for their loved ones, but federal funding for organizations like GCDD provide hope, care and encouragement for these families. Research and education is critical and through federal funding, we will continue to provide meaningful care and support.”

How to Advocate for DD Councils

Individuals with developmental disabilities, their families and other stakeholders can advocate for DD councils. Here is how:

- I Learn more about what DD councils do and their many programs.
- I Once you’re educated, tell your friends and family about the work of DD councils.
- I Most importantly, educate and inform Georgia’s US Congress (Senate and House) delegation about what the DD Council does and how it has helped you or your family.
- I Advocate with Congress to pass a final appropriations bill that fully funds DD Councils at \$73 million and keeps them within the DD Act and current structure because DD Councils work.

Impact of the GCDD Facts

GCDD Supported 7 IPSE (Inclusive post-secondary education) programs that provide students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to attend these Georgia schools:

- | Kennesaw State University
- | East Georgia State College
- | Columbus State University
- | Georgia Institute of Technology
- | Albany Technical College
- | Georgia State University
- | University of Georgia

IPSE Employment Rate Comparison: There is a 40% Employment Rate for Adults with Disabilities who graduated from IPSE programs vs 16% Employment Rate of Adults with Disabilities Overall.

GCDD Supported ASPIRE (Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement)

Student led IEP meetings in schools mean students are more invested in their future and post-secondary outcomes like employment. Over 11,000 students and 4,000 teachers participated this past year across Georgia in this collaboration of GCDD and GA Dept of Education.

GCDD Sponsors Real Communities Partnerships

Real Communities Partnerships purposefully involve people with and without developmental disabilities in collaborative projects to support more inter-connected and self-sufficient communities inclusive of people with disabilities. Current GCDD community partnerships are:

- | Al Tamyoz Community Building/Basmet Ahmed – Clarkston

I Centenary United Methodist Church (Macon Roving Listeners) – Macon
I LaGrange Community – LaGrange
I Forsyth Farmers’ Market – Savannah
I Peacebuilders Camp at Koinonia Farms – Americus

GCDD Educated Georgians and Policymakers on the Benefits of Georgia STABLE Savings Accounts which allow people with disabilities to now save and invest \$14,000 per year since passage of the ABLE Act in Georgia, increasing their financial independence and economic self-sufficiency.

GCDD Sponsored 29 Project SEARCH Sites in GA
Project SEARCH is a business-led, high school-to-work transition program, serving students with developmental disabilities with the outcome of integrated employment.

Project SEARCH Gets Big Results
75% - EMPLOYMENT RATE
25 - AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK
\$9.61 AVERAGE WAGE PER HOUR

Approximate number of Georgians with developmental disabilities represented by GCDD is 158,000

PERSPECTIVES

The Path of Spiritual Advocacy

By Teresa Heard

So, now as a parent, this was a journey I never thought would be as hard and wrought with so many barriers.

The church has always been a haven for my husband and me since we were children. It has been a place where I felt I was a part of something spiritually and socially. My mother was an advocate to find me a spiritual home.

For my son Derek, who has developmental disabilities, church has not been a place that we have seen as a safe haven. It historically has been a place of glares, whispers and criticisms. It is the “hush” sound that others shout when he makes a noise. It is the stares we receive when we come into service late because the music playing is too loud for him. It is the tapping on our shoulders to have our child escorted out because other people are complaining about him laughing out loud periodically. It is the place we leave exhausted and tired because we struggle through the sermon trying not to scream out at everyone ourselves.

It eventually became the place we stopped taking our child to. It is hard enough to just get him ready for church in the morning, much less suffer the judgment we felt once we got there. So, we began to take turns going to church so that my son did not have to endure the ridicule. But, as my son has gotten older and we started having more children, my concern for his spirituality grew.

Why can't my son have a relationship with God in a church? Is there not a place for him as well? We finally came to a

crossroad in our lives several years ago – that taking turns going to church and my son attending church occasionally was not an option for us. He was older and asking so many questions about who he was and who God was. So, we began the journey again to find a church for all of us.

As I looked around for a church to call our spiritual home, I began to slowly understand that the advocacy I was doing for my son in other arenas of his life would have to apply to spiritual advocacy as well.

Now with my son approaching 17, he attends church services at a local church. He does not get the glares anymore and he sits relatively quiet at church. I still have the question in my mind of how much does he understand and is he getting what he needs spiritually out of it?

I realize that I will have to create a path for my son in church, rather than wait and hope for a change to come. It is overwhelming at times to think of it, but I have kept the single thought in my mind – to feed the masses, a few fish and bread is all that is necessary.

Teresa Heard is a parent advocate and member of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities. She is pictured here with her son, Derek.

[A Place of Belonging](#)

By Laura Sugg

We became a part of Centenary United Methodist Church (Centenary) because of their acceptance of all, but also the

acceptance and welcoming of my child and brother, who both have disabilities

What made me want to be a part of this church was their inclusion of all backgrounds, ages, nationalities, beliefs and different learning levels.

Centenary believes that church and community are the essentially the same. Its nonprofit organization Centenary Community Ministries (CCMI) works with several community groups. The Macon Roving Listeners (MRL) is one of the Real Communities Partnerships of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). Through the MRL, individuals with and without disabilities, including youths and adults, have had opportunities to work in the community. The listeners conduct gift interviews of community members, and these interviews allow individuals to share their gifts, talents and love or concerns for Macon. MRL also has community classes and dinners to allow for continued conversations and the development of lasting relationships between individuals with and without disabilities.

With the community outreach programs, such as MRL and others through CCMI and Centenary, we are looking at what individuals need from their community, as well as what individuals need to feel like they belong. How can folks from all walks of life be included and welcomed as positive attributes to their community?

Church is a place where families and communities join, meet and grow. It's a part of our culture. There is this desire to want to be accepted and welcomed into your faith community. At

Centenary, you do not have to change who you are to belong to our church, but that the church accepts you exactly as you are. Faith-based communities are known for helping individuals deal with their struggles. Through support groups and community education classes people can communicate the things they may need or how to make connections, as well as find help for their families or individuals in their families with disabilities. It's a form of advocacy.

You have this connection through your church to be able to say, "Hey, I'm really having trouble" or "I'm concerned about my child who has autism" or any other kind of disability. What can we do to reach out to an organization that works with individuals with disabilities? I think the church aspect gives you a sense of comfort that you can reach out to people.

As a special education teacher, my goal has always been to try to form a more inclusive community where we bring people out and get them involved, as well as help communities be more aware of the gifts and talents of individuals with disabilities.

Laura Sugg is a Special Education Teacher and Transition Specialist at Woodfield Academy, Project Director of the Macon Roving Listeners and Director of Community Building at Centenary United Methodist Church.

REAL COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIPS

Comparing Popular Education and Assets Based Community Development

Sumaya Karimi is the GCDD Real Communities organizing director

In this issue of Making a Difference magazine, the similarities and differences of the Popular Education (PE) and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) methodologies will be explored.

Both PE and the ABCD methodologies respect and believe in:

I Listening to the community and valuing active participation and engagement of all members of the community regardless of their status, abilities, backgrounds, beliefs, races, classes, sexual orientations and cultural differences.

I All community members are the experts of their lives and know what works and does not work in their community. Experts from government agencies, nonprofits, universities and religious organizations that diagnose and have solutions for the community contribute, but do not drive true asset-based community development.

I Asking “What can we do together to improve every neighbor’s life?” because every opinion and idea is important and must be heard and respected.

I Participatory thinking and decision making are important elements that result in a sense of power and ownership. Further, collective leadership challenges hierarchical leadership and instead ensures everyone is capable of leading initiatives, projects and issues that they are passionate about. Collective

action is used for motivation to act in PE; and around gifts and community assets in the ABCD process.

I Self-discovery and purposeful learning encourage self-reflection as well as reflection on community initiatives by asking what worked and what did not work.

I Building a safe and non-competitive environment where minorities, women and people with different abilities flourish.

Differences between PE and ABCD

ABCD focuses on the neighborhood and making it better for everyone. PE focuses on system change and asks questions about systemic violence and marginalization of various groups with a focus on issues of equity and justice.

In the process of self-discovery, PE challenges everyone to reflect and work on his or her biased, racist, prejudiced, xenophobic, patriarchal, misogynist behaviors; while ABCD might shy away from systemic discussions. PE not only asks the questions, but also empowers the community to ask those questions, analyze the issues, find out what the root cause of the issues are and identify how there can be collective action towards a just society.

Through this process, a collective understanding of social issues is developed; consciousness is increased; and actions are taken towards a just society.

Some examples of people who have been influenced by or use PE and a non-violence philosophy are Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Sally Timmel and Anne Hope. Real Communities Partnerships are committed to supporting local communities in Georgia that believe in the four commitments rooted in ABCD and PE methodologies.

- 1) People with developmental disabilities are active members who influence the group's direction.
- 2) Action focuses on making the community better for everyone.
- 3) Over time, the initiative builds up local capacity for collective action.
- 4) Participants share the responsibilities for sharing what they are learning.

Real Communities Partnerships sees the benefits of both methodologies and we encourage the communities that we serve to find their own and best way to build inclusive communities where everyone can succeed.

Real Communities SPOTLIGHT

Al-Tamyoz Community Building Group: Identifying Gifts and Creating Opportunities towards an Inclusive Clarkston

Using the power of networking and relationship building to explore the development of community projects, the Exceptional Community Building Group (Al-Tamyoz) looks to build an inclusive community in the greater Clarkston area. As a Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Real Communities Partnership, Al-Tamyoz looks to create equal opportunities for people with and without disabilities while creating inclusive partnerships with local organizations, people and groups.

“We want to teach the community by experience that people with disabilities are actively involved and that they can make major change,” said Basmat Ahmed, executive director at Al-Tamyoz. “We identify people by their gifts and try to match them with or create a project in the community where that individual could use their gift or enjoy an opportunity for a job.” Al-Tamyoz’s goals center around building, supporting and engaging the Clarkston community with the support of their community builders. These community builders, which include youth and adults with and without disabilities from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan and the US, work on several projects throughout the year.

One group, called the Universally Diverse Group, is made up of high school seniors all from different high schools. At the time of this writing, they are working on collecting donations for the survivors and victims of Hurricanes Irma and Maria as well as looking to raise money for a breast cancer awareness 5K run where donations will go to the Breast Cancer Foundation. Working with city council members and other local government officials has been beneficial in creating inclusive events for Al-Tamyoz as well. “My Community and I,” a weekly local radio show brings in those city council members to announce opportunities around the city for people with developmental disabilities. One of the many adult projects, “My Community and I” is hosted by community builder Sulaimon Salam, who is blind.

Every month, Al-Tamyoz organizes network gathering events and invites people of all different cultures to come together and engage in productive conversation. Its major city

networking event, Culture Village, had almost 3,000 participants from 60 different cultures in attendance. Other networking events have included Thank Your Mentor Day, International Women's Day and its disaster workshop, which is designed to show how to support people with disabilities during a disaster.

Most of Al-Tamyoz's projects are headed up by people with disabilities who also take on many community building leadership roles. "All of our projects are inclusive of people with and without developmental disabilities," Ahmed stated. "But, when we have our public events, we tend to focus a little more on inviting people with disabilities because, in some cases, they feel unwelcome."

Ahmed has found that the response from the whole Clarkston community has been overwhelmingly positive, especially the city government.

"Mayor [Edward] Terry and the city council members are very active in our events," she said. "They've helped us in building connections and work directly with our community overseers – we've built great relationships."

To partner with Al-Tamyoz, apply for a mini-grant or learn more about their monthly events, visit www.gcdd.org/.

2018 Advocacy Days - Save the Dates!

Learn How to Advocate – then Meet Your Legislators at the GA State Capitol!

GCDD Advocacy Days will be held on these dates in 2018:

- January 23
- January 31
- February 14
- February 22
- February 28
- March 15

Stay tuned for more details!