

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 1

On the Cover: Georgia's Inclusive Post-secondary Education (IPSE) programs include (clockwise from top left) Excel at GA Tech, Destinations Dawgs at UGA, the Academy of Inclusive Learning & Social Growth at KSU and CHOICE at EGSC.

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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On the Back Cover: Georgians with Disabilities Rally at Senator
Isakson's office for the No Cuts! No Caps! Campaign to
[#SaveMedicaid](#)

GCDD VIEWPOINT

Advocating for Independence

As I write this, we just celebrated the Fourth of July, America's
fight for independence. For those of us in the disability
community, we are once again in the fight for independence as

the US Congress proposes major changes to Medicaid. Medicaid is the program that has provided independence for people with disabilities.

Throughout the nation, people with disabilities conduct sit-ins at the offices of US Senators – demanding that home and community based services (HCBS) not be taken away. News programs such as MSNBC's The Rachel Maddow Show have done exposés showing the power of advocacy and why HCBS waivers are necessary for people to remain independent and live in the community. I hope that by now everyone reading Making a Difference has called their US Senators and encouraged them to vote against cuts and caps in the Medicaid program.

One of the components of the US Senate proposal takes children with disabilities and chronic healthcare conditions out of the Medicaid cuts. This shows the short sightedness of the Senate. They forget that children grow up. What happens when a child reaches the age of adulthood and needs HCBS waivers and healthcare? What happens when these optional Medicaid services are eliminated by states strapped by budgets that no longer have federal dollars supporting state Medicaid programs? While we have no crystal balls, we can imagine that many people who are now independent, living on their own and holding jobs are forced into state hospitals and nursing facilities – places that the US Supreme Court said were in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The most important thing that the healthcare debate has shown us is that we need to continue advocating – now more

than ever. GCDD needs to build a network of connected and educated grassroots advocates across the State.

In July, we also celebrate the ADA's 27th anniversary. As self-advocates, advocates, parents and other community members fight for people with disabilities, it's important to remember that rights we have today – such as the ADA – were advocated for. Calls were made; letters were sent; meetings with legislators were had. Sharing our stories with policymakers made a difference.

Connect with elected officials and let them know how important services and supports are to you. We encourage you to join GCDD's Advocacy Network to receive our alerts, calls to action and advocacy opportunities. Stay involved and informed! This issue of Making a Difference also covers Atlanta's two new stadiums and other large venues, and how accessibility is designed so it's compliant with the ADA. We head back to school with Georgia's Inclusive Post-Secondary Education programs and learn how they are expanding and growing across the State. And we also talk about communities across the State that are building inclusive and integrated places for all citizens.

Remember that GCDD is here to assist you. 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 writing to valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov

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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.

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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IN THE NEWS

Governor Nathan Deal Launches Georgia STABLE Program

Governor Nathan Deal announced the launch of the Georgia STABLE program on June 14, 2017 at the Georgia State Capital. The program allows Georgians with disabilities and their families to create tax-deferred savings accounts without giving up critically needed Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

“This is a chance for Georgians with disabilities to be able to save their own money and invest it in a way that will allow more opportunities for them to live, work and contribute to their local communities,” said Eric Jacobson, executive director of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD).

“Georgia STABLE will be a major way to meet their financial needs and goals.”

The savings program opens a year after Gov. Deal signed Georgia’s Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. The law allows individuals with disabilities and their families to contribute to a tax-exempt savings account that can be used for maintaining health, independence and quality of life.

Individuals can withdraw the money to pay for qualified disability expenses such as education, employment training and support, housing, health and wellness and transportation.

Georgia will join the Ohio STABLE program, along with Kentucky, Vermont and Missouri. For more information on the Georgia STABLE program, visit [Georgia STABLE Program](#)
[To download the Georgia STABLE program brochure, click here.](#)

STRAIGHT TALK

Revolutionizing Accessibility

By Brandon Winfield

The journey to where I am now all started nearly a decade ago. As far back as I can remember, my love for dirt bikes trumped everything else. I got my first bike at five years old, crashed really hard one time and retired ... for about five years. I got my next dirt bike when we moved back to Georgia and things had changed a lot. There was now a clutch, gears to shift and jumps if you wanted to be even the slightest bit competitive.

I loved dirt bikes, but the main key to racing them was my biggest fear – jumping! I still remember my Dad’s words to this day: “If you want to race motocross, you’re going to have to learn to jump this bike.” And so I did.

My desire to be a great motocross racer outweighed my fear of falling, and I did anything it took to be as competitive as the kids that I saw in the magazines and on the movies. Within my first two years of racing, I had accomplished my dream of racing for American Honda. That is still one of the proudest moments of my life. I was on my way to doing what I wanted to do: race motocross professionally.

A short two years later, that was all taken from me at the age of 14. I broke my spinal cord clean through at the T7-T8 level. As tough as it could be some days to come to terms with the new life that I would be living, I did my best to keep a positive outlook. I was quickly released from rehab and went back home trying to make my life as normal as possible.

I took that energy and tried to never let things slow me down. I traveled around the country with my friends to motocross and action sports events. We went to bars, restaurants, lounges and clubs all in the pursuit of a great time.

However, through all these experiences in new places, I noticed a common trend. While some locations I visited would be handicap accessible, a lot of other features of the place weren't. This was always frustrating, when we would show up someplace and figure out that I couldn't get through the front door or maybe the bathroom was too small.

After a New Year's visit to church with my mom and sister, they left me with some words that stayed with me: "Instead of focusing on New Year's resolutions to better yourself, why not focus on a way to better your community?" It came to me that day as soon as I reached my car: There needs to be an app, where people can review and rate the accessibility of a location they visit. This would take away a lot of the guesswork when people went out to enjoy themselves.

And so was born ParaPerks – a mobile application that would allow people to live their life as I have – wide open and full of memories and experiences. I didn't want fear of the unknown to slow anyone down. ParaPerks aims to be a lifestyle mobile

application that focuses on what our users CAN DO and not on what they can't do.

I dream that one day this mobile app changes accessibility around the world through the power of unity. I hope that everyone joins in on our adventure to “Revolutionize Accessibility.”

Brandon Winfield, founder of ParaPerks, a mobile application where people can review and rate the accessibility of a location they visit, was interviewed by Titania Jordon on Atlanta Tech Edge's show.

Follow ParaPerks' journey at www.paraperks.com, on Facebook at “ParaPerks” or on Instagram at @paraperksllc

FEATURE STORY 1

Back to School with IPSE

by RJ Moshay

Across the country, families and friends extended well wishes and celebrated recent graduates from preschool to PhDs. Social media posts were chock full of videos and photos of smiling graduates in traditional cap and gown attire, flanked by proud loved ones, teachers and mentors.

For many, the next logical step is post-secondary education, ranging from community college to a traditional university. Graduating to new beginnings is the common phrase, but, unfortunately, this has not been a realistic expectation for students with disabilities ... until recently.

With Inclusive Post-secondary Education (IPSE) programs, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) can now realize their dream of continuing their studies in a university setting with their peers. In addition to helping students build self-confidence and become more independent, this education further prepares them to pursue meaningful careers.

Nationwide, there are more than 250 IPSE programs, up from 119 in 2012, per Think College, a national organization focused on advancing inclusive higher education for people with intellectual disabilities. A project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Think College also serves as the National Coordinating Center for 25 federally-funded Transition Post-secondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) projects.

In 2007, the IPSE movement took off in Georgia with a small group of concerned individuals including Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Executive Director Eric Jacobson, parents, teachers and Atlanta area providers who desired to create more positive and productive outcomes for students with disabilities.

In 2009, the Kennesaw State University (KSU) Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth became the first IPSE program in the state, with three students.

From these grassroots and upstart endeavors, 2011 saw the formation of the Georgia Inclusive Post-secondary Education Consortium (GAIPSEC) with the engagement of professors, parents, KSU, several state agencies including the Georgia Department of Education, advocates and GCDD, the

Consortium's legislative lead. In 2012, the Consortium hired its first single point of contact to coordinate the program, and began going after legislative funding in earnest, shared GAIPSEC's Susanna Miller-Raines, MSW, current statewide coordinator.

Housed within the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University, GAIPSEC provides information, training and technical assistance to individuals, families, secondary education programs, colleges and universities. GAIPSEC has been instrumental in growing the number of IPSE programs in Georgia, which now celebrates having seven programs across the State. The individual campus IPSE program sizes range from two students to 50 students in the 2016-17 academic year.

Miller-Raines shared that the "secret sauce" for the Consortium's success in nurturing Georgia's IPSE programs has been the buy-in from state partners.

"We're not fighting against something or to correct something," Miller-Raines said. "We're creating a brand-new inclusion path." Miller-Raines added that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has been around in K-12, and that the IPSE concept was the "next logical step."

ON CAMPUS

Critical to a successful implementation at the campus level has been obtaining unconditional support from campus administration and the student body at large.

Each of Georgia's seven IPSE campus-based programs resonates with the spirit and culture of its host campus. This helps ensure that IPSE students get the typical and wholly integrated college

experience, and walk away with outcomes like those of typically matriculating students.

The KSU Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth has grown from just three students in its inaugural year, to over 50 students during the 2016-2017 academic year.

The Academy offers a fully inclusive college experience to students with I/DD who do not meet the university requirements for admission as degree-seeking students. It includes enrollment as non-degree seeking audit students in typical university courses alongside degree-seeking students. In recent years, the Academy embarked upon more daring and enriching endeavors such as sending three of its students – Charlie Miller, Brielyn Roper-Hubbert and Janet Keller – on a 10-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Academy students were part of a larger KSU contingent that included five Exercise Science and Sports Management students and three staff members.

The trip, considered the first of its kind where students with disabilities were full participants, included stops in Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. “This is inclusive,” said Dr. Ibrahim Elsayy, the Academy’s executive director.

As part of the alternative spring break, Academy students worked as volunteers for a community service project, attended a class at Sharjah University and visited with non-governmental organizations. Along with other KSU students, they visited the Sharjah Sports Council and attended athletic events.

Elsawy chose the UAE because of the country’s progressive work with students with disabilities.

While the KSU Academy's globetrotters build independence and gain a sense of service in a distant land, East Georgia State College's (EGSC) CHOICE (Creating Higher Education Opportunities to Increase College Experiences) program works to instill these same virtues within its students at a "terra firma" level.

Located in the small town of Swainsboro in southeastern Georgia, the program launched in 2015 with three students. In concert with the CHOICE curriculum of career and life skill courses, students take a core of required regular college courses and electives related to their career and life goals. In developing the program, an exploratory team comprised of EGSC administrators, volunteers and special education experts reviewed best practices from Think College, regularly participated in webinars and personally visited the IPSE programs on the campuses of Vanderbilt University (TN), Western Carolina University (NC) and Clemson University (SC). The CHOICE program is a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) as designated by the US Department of Education. One benefit of the CTP is that students are eligible to apply for financial aid. For CTP designation, a program's students must spend at least half of their time in the program in activities with students without disabilities in inclusive courses and work-based training.

Sandy Springs resident Amy Watson, mother of CHOICE student Brea Heard, beams with pride when speaking of her daughter's experiences at EGSC. With an extensive background in secondary special education, Watson, a current doctoral candidate, visited several IPSE programs, including two highly

acclaimed programs in Vermont and Florida. Ultimately, Watson and Brea selected EGSC's CHOICE because of the campus feel, program curriculum and the vision of CHOICE program director Davis.

Brea had an excellent first year, complete with an internship at Swainsboro Middle School. She went on to be inducted into EGSC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, an academic honor society for the top students across the entire campus.

CHOICE recently awarded two students, Daizah Mariah Kelly of Garfield and Benjamin Henry Scott of Swainsboro with the CHOICE Program Certificate of Accomplishment in Work Readiness Skills at the 56th Commencement Ceremony at East Georgia State College in May 2017.

[The New Kids on the IPSE Block](#)

Hosting its inaugural class of five students last Spring, University of Georgia's Destination Dawgs program design was "informed by, and aligns with, several national best practices to support students with disabilities to prepare for employment via inclusion in higher education," said Carol Britton Laws, executive director.

At #DawgNation, inclusiveness for students with disabilities became the platform that two executive teams of the Student Government Association (SGA) either ran on or heavily advocated for an IPSE program. The UGA SGA's lobbying and advocacy efforts garnered nationwide media attention, serving as a cornerstone for campus engagement.

Arkansas native Darby Miller, UGA '17, arrived on campus in the Fall of 2013 with a family legacy of service and a solid personal work ethic. Mesmerized by then SGA Vice President

Jim Thompson's passion for the implementation of an IPSE program at UGA, Miller went on to become a member of the Freshman Senate and, thus began her SGA and student advocacy career.

Miller subsequently joined an SGA Executive branch, and the team continued the IPSE advocacy efforts of the previous SGA administration. They researched other IPSE programs, including those at Vanderbilt University, Clemson and KSU.

SGA's dream of an IPSE program came to life with the Destination Dawgs program's new student orientation in Fall 2016.

When Tennessee native Jordan Huffman and his family relocated to the Northwest Atlanta suburbs during his middle school years, he immediately became a die-hard "Bull Dawg," and boldly proclaimed that he would be going to UGA for college.

His mom, Kathryn Junod, was quite familiar with the IPSE concept after having studied Vanderbilt's programs and offerings during Huffman's grade school days in Tennessee. By the time he entered high school, the number of IPSE programs had grown exponentially. However, UGA's Destination Dawgs program would not launch for nearly a year after Huffman's graduation from Forsyth County's Lambert High School.

"Mr. Unstoppable," would not settle on attending one of the other fine GA-area IPSE programs. Huffman spent another semester in high school and applied to be in the inaugural class of the Georgia Destination Dawgs program, despite fierce competition. "I wanted to manage his expectations," said

Junod. “He was already accepted to other programs, but his heart was set on being a Bulldog.”

Persistence and patience paid off. Huffman received a letter of acceptance from UGA in the fall of 2016; and his video of reading his acceptance letter went viral and was even posted as online content for the NBC Today Show’s website. (See page 20 for link to video.)

The SGA-led approach of rallying the student body to help drive momentum of a fully integrated IPSE program at UGA was a game changer in IPSE program development, achieving national headlines. The evolution of the Destination Dawgs is now considered a best practice-type approach for other schools seeking to establish IPSE programs, shared Cate Weir, M.Ed., Think College program director.

“UGA has done a fabulous job of this in terms of it emanating from their student body presidents and then it really was part and parcel of ‘this is something UGA wants to do and we’re proud of it,’” said Weir.

In concert with SGA support, Destination Dawgs students received phenomenal respect and admiration from their peer mentors and typically matriculating students at large.

“We were extremely diligent in looking for the right peer mentors,” said Anna Berrier Lawrence, Destination Dawgs coordinator. “We wanted people who would be truly committed, and not just seeking another activity for their resume.”

On their own, mentors and UGA friends coordinated a baseball outing to celebrate the birthday of Dawgs student Justin Mejia. The activity was completely planned outside the auspices of the

program, and Justin even received a baseball autographed by several of the ball players.

the payoff

After all the lobbying, administration research, parental sacrifices, student body advocacy, securing funding and sheer willpower, some may wonder if it is all worth it.

The results speak for themselves. On the ground, campuses report that IPSE students are fully engaged in the learning process, and making great headway. Examples include Georgia State Senator Butch Miller's son Charlie's life-changing trip to the Middle East with KSU's Academy and UGA's Destination Dawgs student Huffman recently being awarded a \$5,000 scholarship from Ruby's Rainbow, an Austin, Texas-based nonprofit that grants scholarships to adults with Down syndrome.

Advocacy-wise, GCDD spearheaded a legislative ask of \$300,000 in new funding for the IPSE programs for program sustainability and to provide scholarship opportunities for young adults who wish to attend but are unable to afford the tuition and fees. GCDD's advocacy efforts were wildly successful, achieving a windfall total of \$325,000 in new state funds "for scholarships and operations" within the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) budget. Also, \$175,000 of the IPSE funding established in previous years within the GCDD budget was shifted to GVRA.

The benefits of shifting funding to GVRA are massive in that for every state dollar in the GVRA budget for IPSE, there is a potential to draw down up to four federal dollars.

The opportunities for IPSE in the State of Georgia are practically limitless – giving a chance to all students with disabilities for a bright and meaningful future after high school.

IPSE RESOURCES

[ThinkCollege](#)

[Georgia Inclusive Post-secondary Education Consortium](#)

[Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)

[Going to College](#)

GEORGIA-BASED IPSE PROGRAMS (as of June 2017)

[Kennesaw State University Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth](#)

[University of Georgia Destination Dawgs](#)

[East Georgia State College Choice \(Creating Higher Education Opportunities to Increase College Experiences\)](#)

[Columbus State University GOALS \(Guidance & Opportunities for Academic and Leadership Success\)](#)

[Georgia Tech EXCEL \(Expanding Career, Education and Leadership Opportunities\)](#)

[Georgia State University IDEAL \(Inclusive Digital Expression and Literacy\) Program](#)

[Albany Technical College LEAP \(Leveraging Education for Advancement Program\)](#)

FEATURE STORY 2

Designing Accessibility

By H.M. Cauley

After much anticipation, the Atlanta Braves opened the gates to their new stadium this spring, and the venue has drawn oohs and aahs from fans and concert-goers alike. It's also gotten rave reviews from Dominic Marinelli, a resident of Buffalo who played a special role in creating the guest experience.

Marinelli, who uses a wheelchair, serves as vice president of accessibility services for the New York-based United Spinal Association. In this role, he consults with architects and designers who are working on projects that will open their doors to the public.

Marinelli's extensive background, first-hand experience and expert eye allow him to see accessibility issues that need to be addressed long before a concert hall or stadium is finished.

The rules

According to the US Department of Justice (DOJ) – Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires new stadiums to be accessible to people with disabilities so they, their families and friends can enjoy equal access to entertainment, recreation and leisure.

Other accessibility requirements, such as those for parking lots, entrances and rest rooms, also apply but these are the same as for other buildings. Compliance with all the accessibility requirements is essential to provide a basic level of access for people with disabilities.

On September 15, 2010, the DOJ published revised ADA regulations in the Federal Register that update and amend some of the provisions in the original 1991 ADA regulations. These changes include revised accessibility standards, called

the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design (2010 Standards), which establish minimum criteria for accessibility in design and construction.

The 2010 Standards applied to State and Local Governments and Places of Public Accommodations.

This includes any non-federal department, agency, district or instrumentality of a State or local government. (e.g., state arts commissions and councils, city-owned or operated cultural centers, recreational venues and parks, libraries, state colleges and universities.)

Places of Public Accommodation include any facility operated by a private, non-governmental entity and open to the public. For example: theaters, museums, concert halls, arts and performing arts centers, stadiums, private colleges and universities, lecture halls, galleries, parks, zoos, other places of exhibition or entertainment and assembly areas.

These standards became mandatory after 18 months, or March 15, 2012. On and after this date, the standards mentioned were replaced by the 2010 Standards, which became mandatory and enforceable, and must be applied to all new construction, renovations, modifications, alterations and barrier removal.

The 2010 Standards also raised the accessibility standards of different components of a complete fan experience.

There were new requirements for the Assistive Listening Systems (ALS) that determined audible communication is integral to the use of the space, but are not required where audio amplification is not provided – such as sporting events. Additionally, 25% of the receivers must be hearing aid compatible.

The revised regulations also included a section devoted exclusively to the regulation of ticketing for wheelchair spaces and companion seats, among other provisions.

STADIUMS

“Accessibility and what we do has always been part of the organization,” says Marinelli. “But within the last several years, what we do has really increased three or four times from when we started.”

Hiring accessibility experts has become the norm on major stadium projects, echoes Mike Galifianakis, the State’s ADA coordinator for Georgia’s Financing and Investment Commission. “Accessibility has come so far that the design and build firms always hire an accessibility consultant to review plans, do the checks, measure parts of construction and do the sign offs,” he says.

In 2007, the Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission (GSFIC) and the State ADA Coordinator’s Office initiated the Statewide Facilities Accessibility Project.

Recognizing the State’s leadership role in ensuring accessible design throughout Georgia’s public and private sectors, the State established a comprehensive accessibility plan for state-owned and operated facilities, in order to increase the accessibility and usability of these facilities for persons with disabilities.

Establishing that code was a significant part of the work performed by Marinelli’s association, whose roots go back as far as the days post-World War II when returning veterans – many of whom never believed they’d ever get out of the

hospital – found themselves back in the world where accessibility issues were not addressed.

“They were discharged into the wonderfully inaccessible world of 1946 New York,” says Marinelli. “So our organization began then to work on access for our members – people with spinal cord injuries or diseases.”

When Marinelli first went to work for the association, his focus was largely on developing accessibility standards for buildings.

“We researched what our members needed, and that went into our standards,” he recalls. “Then in 1986, that standard began to be adopted by building codes around the country and became the basis for the Fair Housing Act and the original ADA standards.”

Because of that expertise, the association has historically played a role in developing accessibility requirements for people with any disability, and the staff has become what Marinelli describes as “accidental consultants” who now work on building codes and present information about those codes to design professionals and architects around the country. Among the variety of projects they add their ideas to are stadiums.

“We’ve been working on [stadiums] for a long time,” says Marinelli. “Over time, the standards have been refined to incorporate things that solve the unique challenges of a large assembly area.”

Among Marinelli’s credits are the new Yankees Stadium, the refurbished Madison Square Garden, the Minnesota Vikings’ US Bank Stadium and Target Field, the home turf of the Minnesota Twins. In Atlanta, he was a key advisor for the Braves’ new

SunTrust Park, and he is currently working with the builders of Mercedes-Benz Stadium where the Atlanta Falcons and Atlanta United will officially call home this fall.

One of the first steps he takes is to review architectural plans and pinpoint any possible design issues. He ensures that basic requirements around the slopes of ramps, elevators, accessible concession stands and bathrooms are in place. By the time the construction documents are finalized, the key elements are usually in place, but Marinelli goes farther, making it a point to host focus group meetings with members of the public to hear first-hand what their needs are.

“We are a disability organization, and we represent people with spinal cord injuries or diseases, so that is the community we meet with to get their feedback,” he says. “We met with fans of the Braves and Falcons to talk about their experiences in the old stadiums and to hear what they’d like to see in the new ones.”

Public venues such as stadiums pose unique challenges to accessibility, Marinelli says. Among the issues he’s worked to address in his projects, including those in Atlanta are availability of wheelchair spaces, inclusion, dispersed seating and line of sight. (See sidebar at right.)

[The Total Fan Experience](#)

“In one way or the other, sports teams and their owners often solicit information from disability communities or the public to try and incorporate accessibility features into the design, even features that may not be required by code,” added Galifianakis.

Marinelli did just that. The team held focus groups that would recommend additional improvements to make the fan experience memorable for people with all abilities.

The focus groups in Atlanta suggested additional improvements such as more power outlets, restroom access and even accessible concession stands.

As a result, those visiting SunTrust Park and Mercedes-Benz Stadium who need power for their support systems will find outlets at accessible spaces. In addition to bathrooms with accessible stalls, patrons will find more family restrooms that make it easy for members of the opposite sex to assist those who need help, and those facilities will be spread throughout the stadiums. Instead of having only a few accessible concession stands, fans will find all of the counters have been lowered to 36 inches.

These improvements demonstrate that both teams are committed to making their home fields as easy to access as possible, says Marinelli.

“In both these stadiums, the teams were proactive in getting us involved. And they weren’t just giving these issues lip service. The Braves, for instance, had a committee we worked with, and the Falcons sent a representative to all of our meetings. Both of them understood the issues facing people with disabilities.” Just before SunTrust Park opened, Marinelli had the chance for a final visit to see how accessible it is. “It’s just beautiful, bright and airy,” he says. “I think people will find both these new stadiums are significantly better. They’re like going from a Pinto to a Cadillac!”

Atlanta Braves SunTrust Park

All levels of the Braves SunTrust Park offer accessible seating with unobstructed views of the playing field. Red circles with an A inside indicate where accessible seats are located on the map at left. [Click on the map for a larger view.](#)

For their guests with developmental disabilities, the Braves also provide a [Sensory Map and a Social Storybook guide to the stadium.](#)

Atlanta Falcons Mercedes-Benz Stadium

Accessible seating at the Atlanta Falcons new Mercedes-Benz stadium ensures that people using wheelchairs are not isolated from other spectators or their friends or family. Red circles with an A inside indicate where accessible seats are located on the map above. [Click on the map for a larger view.](#)

Public Venue Accessibility issues

I Availability of Wheelchair Spaces: At least one percent of the seating must be wheelchair seating locations. Each wheelchair seating location is an open, level space that accommodates one person using a wheelchair.

I Inclusion: Accessible seating must be an integral part of the seating plan so that people using wheelchairs are not isolated from other spectators or their friends or family.

I Dispersed Seating: Whenever more than 300 seats are provided, wheelchair seating locations must be provided in more than one location. This is known as dispersed seating. Wheelchair seating locations must be dispersed throughout all

seating areas and provide a choice of admission prices and views comparable to those for the general public.

I Line of Sight: Spectators in wheelchairs must be able to see the action on the field when the crowd around them is standing by installing raised wheelchair areas.

FEATURE STORY 3

Talent and Jobs Are Building Stronger Communities

By Jennifer Bosk

Grassroots efforts are building stronger communities in both Macon and Lawrenceville by showcasing the talents and work skills of people with disabilities. These successful efforts are promoting awareness, changing attitudes and encouraging inclusion among everyday citizens – all driven by people who decided to take charge and make change in their own communities.

Community based movements must rely on engaged community members at the local level to work together toward common goals to improve their community. These movements and organizations encourage community members to contribute by taking responsibility for and addressing the needs they see in their community.

Across Georgia, many community leaders have found ways to make their cities and towns more inclusive and better integrate people with and without disabilities through improved accessibility and transportation. Others have developed

inclusive businesses that are providing meaningful employment or formed art groups that allow people to express themselves through performance or visual arts.

In some cases, local community members have taken it upon themselves to address specific needs in their hometown to create more inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities and integrated more and more local citizens with the disability movement.

Musically Inclined

In Macon, community members organizing around the talents of people with disabilities and the local residents are sitting up and taking notice. Amazingly, a 15-year-old found a way to bring beautiful music to the community as a gift and bring purpose to many people's lives.

Leah Duval grew up with two wonderful influences in her life, the love of singing and the love for her 47-year-old aunt who has developmental disabilities. A 10th grader at Howard High School in Macon, Duval has combined those two loves into one wonderful service project – Gifted Harmony.

Gifted Harmony brings together people with and without developmental disabilities who love to sing and to share their talent with the Macon community. Gifted Harmony is an inclusive chorus made up of a dozen singers of a variety of ages and races, all with disabilities ranging from Down syndrome to autism, which blends their singing with members of Leah's high school choir. This enriches the songs and the experience and allows for mentoring and interaction between the high schoolers and the members with developmental disabilities.

Since the beginning, community reaction was welcoming. The chorus has performed for Mercer University, Central Georgia Technical College, a muscular dystrophy fundraiser, and Hazzard Baptist and First Baptist churches. In addition, the community rallied around the group with First Baptist Church on New Street donating rehearsal space for the chorus while other local businesses provided funding for chorus T-shirts, choir gowns and a post-concert reception.

Impact on the chorus members who have disabilities has been great, too. Leah mentions one chorus member on the autism spectrum who was extremely shy and would not sing very loud. Now she has become the chorus' most powerful singer, is extremely social and has developed strong bonds with the other chorus members.

Gifted Harmony has also developed a dedicated following that goes from event to event to hear the chorus sing. "The impact on the community has been mind-blowing," says Leah's mother, Wanda.

Nandi Isaac is a member of Gifted Harmony. Nearly 34 years old, Nandi is diagnosed with Down syndrome, is legally blind and loves singing. "This is the first blended chorus and includes all abilities, ages, color and races. But, all that goes away when they sing," explains Nandi's mother, Nalini.

"Leah, the chorus director, is very aware of the gifts of others," adds Nalini, describing a recent performance where everyone had a role in addition to singing. Some members read scripture, others took an offering. Nandi read a poem. Since joining the chorus, the biggest change in Nandi is her willingness to put her time and talent into it. Nandi owns and

operates Scan with Nan that digitizes and saves printed photographs and memorabilia. “After looking after her day-to-day business, she didn’t always like to go out during what Nandi likes to call her ‘me time.’ But when the chorus calls, she goes,” her Mom says.

In addition to the chorus and her business, Nandi serves on the board of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) as a self-advocate and on the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities’ (DBHDD) Developmental Disability Advisory Council. She participates on an advisory group for Participant Direction, a program that allows for personal choice and control over the delivery of 19 waiver services for those who live in their own private residence or the home of a family member.

But when Nandi sings, explains Nalini, “there’s joy and a dynamic of something really going on!”

Like Gifted Harmony, other community organizations are also changing lives and communities across the Georgia landscape using the arts, including ABEL 2 in Atlanta whose mission is to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and the underserved by creating music and arts opportunities for employment and entertainment. The organization provides artistic programming to inspire, educate and equip their attendees to become agents of change in their own lives and in the lives of those in their communities.

Sweet Tooth

Meanwhile, in Lawrenceville, GA, a business is having a sweet impact on its employees and the community.

About a decade ago, Tempa and Michael Kohler started thinking about plans for their son Bradley who was born with Fragile X syndrome. Bradley would soon be aging out of the county-supported programs and his parents were helping him look for employment.

The Kohlers soon realized there weren't a lot of employment options available for people with disabilities, so they took matters into their own hands. Tempa's love of baking inspired Special Kneads and Treats, a bakery employing adults with and without disabilities. Currently, the business employs 16 adults with disabilities, has four volunteers and has 150+ potential employees on a waiting list.

Besides finding a way to address an ongoing employment issue for the disability community, Special Kneads and Treats also focused on uplifting the entire Lawrenceville community by giving back.

The group works with local food ministry cooperatives, elderly care facilities, battered women and children's homes and medically fragile children's homes as well as many locally owned businesses and community outreach programs to provide for those less fortunate or in need with specialty baked goods and services.

"Our program provides strategic partnerships between local business and government enterprises in these same communities. Special Kneads and Treats, Inc. facilitates job skill training in the bakery by providing a safe environment for the workers and serving as a resource center for individuals in the community while providing holistic life skill development

through love and caring for all residents,” as stated on the bakery’s website.

Approximately, 600 customers come through the door each week purchasing almost 1,800 cupcakes as well as other cakes, cookies and treats. Sometimes up to 30 free birthday cakes and sweets are pro donated to various other nonprofits and specialty groups in support of special needs or those less fortunate.

The bakery will soon move to a larger space where more people with and without disabilities will be employed; and the building will be more suitable for those requiring wheelchairs and walkers. In addition, the larger facility will allow the bakery to produce more products in support of people who deserve employment opportunities and provide for those who face economic challenges. Eventually, the founders hope the facility can be used as a distribution point to feed into small store fronts in surrounding cities, which in turn would allow for more special needs employment and community outreach.

Building Stronger Communities

Building stronger, more inclusive communities comes in many different forms. Most importantly, community enhancements rely on individuals and community leaders to recognize the needs and the potential of their own community and work to make it more inclusive for everyone.

Is there a community builder, group or business working hard to make your community more inclusive and integrated for people with disabilities?

Reach out to GCDD at submissions@gcdd.org and share your story!

MIA'S SPACE

Why Are We Still Here?

By Pat Nobbie, PhD, Mia's mom

It's conference season. I travel the country and talk to families, people with disabilities, providers, and academics about what's happening. This summer, the theme is social determinants of health – the impact that employment, stable, safe and affordable housing, peer support, access to healthy food, friends and relationships have on a person's health.

These are not things that have been typically included in health care plans, although it makes intuitive sense. How can you stick to a medication routine for asthma, or make it through chemo, if you don't have stable housing? How can you manage depression or anxiety when you have nothing to do during the day? How can you build resiliency to changes in your life if you have no significant relationships? If you don't have access to healthy food on a consistent basis, how do you manage your diabetes? Or your weight?

Health care is getting a social life. The medical/acute care world is branching out and realizing that the social aspects of someone's life are intertwined with their physical and mental well-being and the well-being of their family. Figuring out how to integrate these aspects of life into reimbursable services is tough – and even more so under the threat of drastic reductions in public financing. I don't have all the answers yet.

Certainly, the goal is not “he who has the most services wins.” Charitable and faith-based entities can’t carry the whole load. And we cannot assume that families can manage it all – we have too many scary statistics on the economic costs to society for lengthy unpaid family caregiving. But certainly, we could remove barriers that prevent access to the diverse things that make up the community that supports us all, and among us, people with more unique needs.

Mia is present with me in all these conversations through our experiences of supporting her and how living space, employment and extensive social engagement has made her life in the community possible. Against the threat of our social safety net unraveling, we need to think about strengthening access to the community especially for those who have been previously left out.

I’m at a loss for words. Or at least words that combine in theme and lead to a point that is related to Mia. I have a lot of words – about the anxiety many people who receive Medicaid are experiencing, about my experiences in the past few weeks, speaking at conferences to parents and their young adults, about employment mostly and hearing their stories. Like the autistic young man who worked very successfully in a public library in New York, and because of a change in his family situation, moved to another state to live with another family member. When he went to VR to find another job they referred him to Publix to bag groceries. He knew the Dewey Decimal system!

Or the family whose 44-year-old daughter worked with a provider and a job coach to get a job at a theme park

restaurant, but after four months was fired – turns out she wasn't doing her restaurant work. But where was the job coach? And there was no communication with the employer or the parents. Or the mom with a 22-year-old son with learning disabilities who always wanted to work, had several good jobs, and just when he put money down on his first car, was transferred within a dealership to the garage after working on the floor, with no explanation, no transition and was fired when he expressed his frustration.

Is that enough words? After so many years of employment work, so much training, new federal policies that support work, a recovering economy. Why are we still here?

Here are my top few recommendations:

- | Use provisions in the HCBS settings rule to consolidate waivers, creating a menu of services and supports, and use individualized assessments and person-centered planning to help individuals or their representatives select from the menu. Families tend to be conservative and only take what they need.
- | Build natural supports into each person-centered plan.
- | Expand shared living options.
- | Support PAID family caregiving.
- | Expand participant direction, coupled with support for participants to manage their budgets.
- | Increase support worker wages. Turnover costs anywhere from \$2500 to \$5000 per employee, not to mention the effects of rotating staff on the people they support. Paid caregiving will be the fastest growing segment of the labor market to keep

pace with the baby boomers who will need them. Who was that talking about job creation?

I Include small scale transportation innovations in infrastructure investment. The biggest barrier to people accessing their health care, employment, healthy food and social life is lack of transportation. Who was that talking about infrastructure?

I Focus on employment.

I Employ technology. New devices and apps should be more available to more people.

Each of these could be a whole column. Individuals with disabilities and their representatives know best what works. We must speak the truths we have learned to the new powers that be.

REAL COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIPS

Real Communities Organizes Community Change with ABCD
Sumaya Karimi is the GCDD Real Communities organizing director

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is a method for organizing community change by focusing on the primary assets of a neighborhood rather than what may be perceived as its needs or liabilities. It is a neighbor-driven process that builds relationship, connection and collaboration in the community. Ideas are shared in response to the underlying question, “What can we do together to improve every neighbor’s life?”

Ultimately, a safer environment evolves as everyone feels empowered to do more to take ownership and bring about necessary change.

ABCD focuses on the assets of the people in the community, as well as on associations, institutions and physical spaces. For example, when a person who lives in the neighborhood loves, connects and works well with children and youth, then this is an asset which should be used appropriately. Young people can be engaged as they respond to the question, “What would you like to do to improve your community?” Empowered with a sense of ownership, they take charge of the improvements they want to see. It can be as simple as children cleaning and beautifying a neglected area; improving the school environment; tackling gang violence; or participating in local government. The efforts of the entire community are multiplied exponentially when there is intentional inclusion and active involvement of diverse, marginalized populations, such as youth, the elderly, the poor, people of color, people with disabilities, all genders and sexual orientation, immigrants, refugees and all religions.

Neighborhood Associations or informal local groups take on the role of asking key questions: “What else can be done to improve our community?” “What relationship should be built?” “What connection should be fostered?” “What allies should be identified?” “What are the caps?” “What resources are needed?” “What is the role of the institution and how can it support the local initiative?” The ABCD approach is to look first within the community for its assets and, if necessary, take steps to leverage outside resources.

Another component of ABCD is a locally based economy which includes the goods and services sold within each community. Purchasing power is leveraged to support local businesses to keep the wealth within the community. The local group or association poses key questions: “How do businesses invest in the community?” “What should be the role of businesses within the community?” “How can the members of the community support the local economy?” Worker/owners are empowered to keep their wealth within their communities. Because social responsibility is taken seriously, co-op participants become invested in both the economic freedom of each other, as well as in the economic viability of the broader community.

Physical Assets include land, parks, green spaces, recreational centers and playgrounds. These physical spaces are built and maintained in a way that includes everyone in the neighborhood. It means the spaces are welcoming and accessible to children, people with disabilities and the elderly. They are designed to value the arts and culture of every race, ethnicity and religion and to be animal-friendly.

These groups, in constant collaboration with community members, take responsibility for being inclusive by building relationships and inviting all to be involved. Participation is based on a commitment to be accountable for shared resources and the betterment of the community.

Real Communities SPOTLIGHT

Forsyth Farmers' Market: Providing A Welcoming and Inclusive Place For Local Food in Savannah

On any Saturday from 9 AM to 1 PM at the south end of Forsyth Park on Park Avenue in Savannah, the Forsyth Farmers' Market (FFM) sells a wide array of fresh vegetables, fruits, breads, meats and cheeses while educating patrons on proper food preparation and cooking. The mission of the market is for people to come together in an inclusive space that is positive and promotes local food access for the larger Savannah community.

As a Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Real Communities Partnership, FFM has served as a corner-stone in developing a more welcoming neighborhood and providing opportunities for people with and without disabilities for community connection and contribution.

Mixed Greens, a grassroots group, interfaces with FFM and hosts a variety of learning opportunities and interactive projects, embracing shared and inclusive life experiences. "We have offered programs in Mindful Eating and Food Awareness to encourage and support the use of fresh produce and home prepared foods," says Patricia Richardson, who is a co-community builder with the group. "We will start a film series on food access, community gardens and universal accessibility next month."

Created five years ago, Mixed Greens began meeting at people's homes and local offices before deciding on William's

Court, an apartment complex for the elderly and people with disabilities. There they would engage farmers and gardeners in the community and learn about their experiences growing food.

Currently the office and meeting place is located within Wesley Oak Methodist Church campus where Mixed Greens has begun a community garden, collaborating with the church and neighbors. Some produce from the garden has been sold on the 912 Farm Truck, a portable market that travels to “desert neighborhoods” to deliver fresh produce. Desert neighborhoods are areas that do not have access to fresh food. There is an herbalist on board who, along with the farm truck manager, educates people in the neighborhood how to best use the produce and the concepts of farm to table.

To expand access, FFM allows neighbors who use SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) /EBT (electronic benefits transfer) to shop for healthy food. The system also offers a “double value” program for SNAP/EBT shoppers where they receive \$100 of fresh produce for \$50. Creating choice and assistance to all in the community for healthy food is part of their mission.

Currently, Mixed Greens is collaborating with SUGA, Savannah Urban Garden Alliance, which connects community gardens in the city with: local school gardens; LIFE, Inc.; local and regional Rotary Clubs; and Hospice Savannah. One of Mixed Greens goals is to create space where there is open conversation about life and health patterns (including issues with disability) that are sometimes difficult to address. By partnering with GCDD,

FFM and Mixed Greens seek to increase their local and statewide organizational relationships.

Growing FFM isn't easy and the bulk of the work done is through volunteerism. They encourage volunteers of all kinds to come out and help with the market, in the garden or through programming. Each year, volunteers contribute more than 1,300 hours.

Since, 2014, three part-time co-community builders with disabilities have taken on active leadership roles. "Mixed Greens has been an integral part of hospitality at FFM and beyond," says Richardson. "We have used the Real Communities four commitments to guide our work and we have experienced them come to life in our experiences with Mixed Greens."

To sign up to be a volunteer, be a sponsor of the Forsyth Farmers' Market or to learn more about Mixed Greens, visit www.gcdd.org

PERSPECTIVES

In this issue of Making A Difference magazine, we share four perspectives of students and their parents who have enrolled or graduated from Inclusive post-secondary education programs (IPSE) in Georgia.

Building a Future

By Jordan Huffman and Kathryn Junod

Jordan Huffman

Freshman at University of Georgia's Destination Dawgs
Athens, GA

Jordan: I had my heart set on becoming a University of Georgia Bulldog. When I heard about the Destination Dawgs program, I knew I wanted to go there. In my first semester, I learned new things and what I am interested in. My favorite class is wellness, but some challenges are paying attention and staying awake in class. I love sports like Special Olympics basketball, horseback riding and flag football. I decided that I want to be a sportscaster for ESPN. I plan on interviewing my friend Adam, who is on the baseball team, and his teammates and coaches. I love being a Georgia Bulldog at Destination Dawgs!

Kathryn: We started looking at IPSE options when Jordan was in elementary school because we wanted him to have options and the same opportunities as kids without disabilities. We understood what the eligibility requirements for IPSE were, and made sure his IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) was planned to meet those. It was made clear to Jordan that this was the path he was on. As parents, we set a foundation for his success by encouraging his independence. When he got accepted into Destination Dawgs, I did have hesitation because it was a new program, new teachers and a whole new environment. Once we went through the orientation and met his peer mentors, I knew everything was going to be fine. Every semester was going to be a challenge – just like for any college student. But I am excited for what's ahead for Jordan, and I hope to see him

live and work independently. (Kathryn Junod is the parent of Jordan Huffman.)

[Check out the YouTube video of Jordan reading his acceptance letter.](#)

Achieving Dreams

By Benjamin Scott and Corine Hampton

Benjamin Scott

Graduate of the CHOICE Program for Inclusive Learning at East Georgia State College

Twin City, GA

Benjamin: I decided to go to CHOICE because I wanted to better my life and my career. I currently also work at UPS in materials management. I now plan to attend Georgia Southern University and major in Logistics. The program helped me gain confidence, self-esteem and made me more outgoing. Some students might not think that college is an option because of their disability, but it is. To be successful in college, never get behind on assignments, take advantage of all the resources and support and always speak up. Attending CHOICE was the best decision I have made.

Corine: At first, I was afraid to let Benjamin go to CHOICE. He had been so sheltered. I knew he was capable, but I was afraid to let him go. He told me about the program, and I knew this was his dream. The people at CHOICE guided him and taught him not only his schoolwork, but also how to be independent.

That is the best thing to teach your child: independence. He changed dramatically. At first, he would not speak to you, but now he has grown as a person who has confidence. He has held a job, and now will continue his studies at Georgia Southern. He's ready for it. This experience taught me that just because your child has a disability, it does not mean that they lack potential. You might not be able to see it, but you have to give them a chance to grow, learn and dream. (Corine Hampton is the parent of Benjamin Scott.)

EXPERT UPDATE

IPSE Grows across the Nation

By Cate Weir, M.Ed.

The historical growth of inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) options nationally has been slow, but a grassroots effort has led the way since the late 1990s.

Before the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, IPSE programs were started by a mom or a dad who wanted a college experience for their child. That still happens today.

Parents are a huge impetus for the development of these programs, working with their networks, making connections and making the case so new opportunities are available.

There are now approximately 265 programs nationally that meet the fundamental definitions of inclusive post-secondary education for youth with intellectual disabilities. Some of the main things that are happening nationally are a result of

funding by the Think College National Coordinating Center (TCNCC).

The First Cohort

In 2010, the first cohort of approximately 2,100 students participated in a model demonstration project, Transition and Post-secondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID). In the first five years, Think College collected data on students up to 90 days after graduation and those who left the program. We found a 40% paid competitive employment rate among all the program participants from year one to year five. In context, National Core Indicators Data clocked in employment per adults with disabilities at around 16%.

Through this study, we are seeing decent employment rates for graduates, and are now embarking on a more comprehensive data collection. Over the next five years, Think College will produce a more robust report on outcomes for these students. The second cohort of students launched in 2016.

Person-centered Approach

Employment is important, but things like being able to live in your own apartment, living with friends you made in college, feeling more self aware, being a better self-advocate and learning to coordinate a person-centered planning team around your life are also important outcomes. IPSE college programs really do a good job with person-centered planning, which 100% of the programs are using.

Students are learning how to access adult support services which is very important for their quality of life. They have the

opportunity to run their own meetings and set their own goals for themselves within the program.

There are several other things that will certainly impact Georgia and other programs nationally. In the last five years, 2010-2015, Think College has developed model accreditation standards for IPSE programs.

Currently there are no set standards of practice, but Think College at least defined foundations for setting up programs. However, IPSE programs are not accredited like other higher education programs at a college or a university.

TCNCC is working on how that accreditation process will work, who might be the accrediting agency or whether our own accrediting agency must be created.

Related to accreditation is the concept of the kind of credentials students can earn in these programs. Initially, the idea behind IPSE was that students would attend, have a college experience, learn and get employment. But what will they earn?

That's one of the first questions a typical college student asks: what will I earn when I graduate? For IPSE, this was not even on the radar 20 years ago. But now, we're really focusing on what it means to attend one of these programs. If an employer is interviewing two students – one who went to the IPSE program at Georgia Tech and one who did not, what does the employer think about their credentials?

Benchmarks

Right now, Think College has hundreds of students and would like to have 2,000-3,000 follow-up records. For a robust report, we need a good group of students that we hear from every year

who tell us what they've been doing and what their outcomes have been.

We also pay a lot of attention to what happens in the programs themselves. What are the program's practices? For example, the Higher Education Opportunity Act states that students in IPSE programs need to be participating in academic opportunities with peers without disabilities at least 50% of the time. We have yet to see 50% academic inclusion in the data we collect, but we constantly support this goal.

Program practices that we have benchmarked are more paid employment, paid employment within the program and growing inclusive academic opportunities. We want to see every campus have an IPSE program where students can live on campus, but outside data shows that currently 32% are not eligible.

Many nonresidential programs do an excellent job of having students come to campus every day. And they're not only going to class, but participating in clubs and working on campus. But while this maximizes opportunities, there is a different experience when you really live on campus. It creates the support structure people need 24/7 away from home and can remove additional barriers.

WIOA

Georgia's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) has been a model in terms of how to implement WIOA through the use of IPSE for transition services and for employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities.

WIOA specifically mentions IPSE opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities, and also focuses on transition-aged

youth, spending 25% of their budget on transition services. However, it's important these programs do not turn into work programs where someone just gets a vocational certificate. Students should not only have that option, but also inclusive choices like every other college student.

Georgia's Growth

Georgia has seen remarkable growth with seven IPSE programs across the State and more in the planning stages. This brings a variety of options to people in Georgia because they are different kinds of colleges, which offer different courses of study.

The State has an organized infrastructure led by Georgia State University, which has always been strong. While Georgia currently has a federal grant, it was previously doing great work partnering with agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation. Georgians were advocating at the legislative level. What Georgia is doing is really the future of inclusive post-secondary education.

Cate Weir, M.Ed. is the program director of the Think College National Coordinating Center (TCNCC), funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education at the US Department of Education. TCNCC is a training and technical assistance center focused on post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Weir manages all aspects of the national technical assistance center, including product development and dissemination, national technical assistance provision, and large scale and targeted training.

GCDD Launches Campaign to #SaveMedicaid

Campaign fights \$800 billion in cuts to Medicaid

Georgians with disabilities, together with agencies, organizations and nonprofits who serve them, launched the No Cuts! No Caps! campaign to bring attention to the OVER \$800 billion cuts to Medicaid in the US Senate proposed Better Care Reconciliation Act.

One in five Georgians depend on Medicaid services. Medicaid provides approximately 400,000 people with disabilities in Georgia with access to critical care that helps them live, work and participate in their communities. This includes personal care services, specialized therapies, mental health services, special education services, respite care and employment supports. These critical services are not available under private insurance.

GCDD Leads the Georgia Campaign

“People with disabilities are contributing members of our community, and the proposed Medicaid cuts will be devastating not only to the disability community, but to the State of Georgia,” said Eric Jacobson, executive director of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). GCDD is leading the Georgia campaign to [#SaveMedicaid](#).

The bill proposes to drastically cut federal Medicaid to states, including through “per capita caps.” Georgia will be disproportionately hurt by these caps because of the state’s low Medicaid spending. The State is 50th in Medicaid spending on

people with disabilities combined with it having one of the highest federal match rates – 68.5% of all of Georgia’s Medicaid costs are paid by the federal government.

The loss of billions of dollars in federal Medicaid funding could lead to service reductions, longer waitlists and cuts in provider reimbursement rates. Optional home and community-based services (HCBS) are most at risk.

Get Your Voice Heard by Your Legislators

“It is important that our legislators, in Georgia and Washington, DC, understand how cuts and caps to Medicaid under this proposed bill will negatively impact their constituents,” said Jacobson. “We aim to rally the Georgia community that relies on Medicaid to call their Senators and share their stories. Advocacy is the most important and effective way to get your voice heard.”

For more on Georgia’s No Cuts! No Caps! [#SaveMedicaid](https://www.gcdd.org/save-medicaid) campaign, www.gcdd.org/save-medicaid