

## Making a Difference Magazine

A Quarterly Magazine of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

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

Winter 2018

Volume 18, Issue 3

On the Cover: GCDD's 2017 Take Your Legislator To Work Day (TYLTWD) participants included (top photo) Bayley Bristow and Sen. Fran Millar; (left to right photos) Elizabeth Terzich and Sen. Mike Dugan; Jack Prettyman and Rep. Scott Hilton; Rep. Sheila Jones and Matthew Roush; and Elizabeth Cicerchia and Sen. Michael "Doc" Rhett.

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: GCDD announces three new NoFAs (Notice of Funds Available) requesting proposals for initiatives that will help the Council achieve the goals outlined in its Five Year State Plan.

## GCDD VIEWPOINT

### Time to Advocate

Welcome to 2018! As I write, the United States Congress is celebrating passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. While they celebrate, we are trying to figure out how it will impact people with disabilities and the services they need. At the

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), we are watching how the Georgia legislature and the state agencies react.

Will the tax legislation result in less federal revenue which means cuts to Medicaid? Will people with disabilities experience cuts to Medicaid? If the tax legislation results in increased federal revenue because of a growing economy, do people with disabilities experience that growth with new jobs or increased benefits in programs like Medicaid? These are the issues we will be watching over the coming months and years. This all began on Tuesday, January 9, 2018, when the Georgia General Assembly started. We expect this to be a “quick” session because legislators will campaign for the November 2018 elections. However, they have important business to do before they can adjourn. They must pass a budget and will be doing so without really understanding how the new federal tax legislation will impact the state budget. GCDD will work with legislators to continue addressing the waiting list for home and community-based services.

We hope that the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities will soon submit to the legislature a multi-year plan to address the waiting list with strategies that we as advocates can support over the next year. We will also continue to support funding to move the remaining individuals from state Intermediate Care Facilities for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/DD) facilities. Even though the Department of Justice settlement may formally end on June 30, we must continue to push the State to honor its commitment to move individuals into the community.

GCDD is increasing its effort to educate legislators and involve you as advocates in the legislative process. We recently awarded grants to: 1) promote, create and sustain an advocacy movement for individuals with developmental/intellectual disabilities; 2) collect stories from individuals with developmental disabilities within each senate district for advocacy, media and outreach; and 3) to increase the number of people engaged in Medicaid advocacy.

In addition, we will support efforts to expand knowledge about supported decision making in Georgia. We think these new projects will help Georgians with developmental disabilities become better informed and engaged with the political process and make better decisions in their lives.

Finally, this edition of Making a Difference will highlight Take Your Legislator to Work Day. GCDD continues to feature people with disabilities who have meaningful employment. This is another way to show our elected officials how individuals have meaningful lives while being part of the community.

We will kick off our 2018 Advocacy Days on January 23, with six Advocacy Days covering different topics that affect people with developmental disabilities. Learn more about this advocacy platform in the magazine, and we hope you, your families, colleagues and community participate.

Check out GCDD's 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 writing to

[maria.pinkelton@gcdd.ga.gov](mailto:maria.pinkelton@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 [maria.pinkelton@gcdd.ga.gov](mailto:maria.pinkelton@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.

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## AROUND GCDD

### [GCDD Awards Grants to Four Local Organizations to Support People with Disabilities](#)

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) has awarded four new grants to support work that promotes and improves opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and their families and builds a more inclusive Georgia.

Selected organizations and their funded project areas are:

- | Georgians for a Healthy Future – Public Health Medicaid Advocacy
- | Friends of L'Arche Atlanta – Story Collection
- | Sangha Unity Network – Expanding Self-Advocacy
- | Georgia Advocacy Office – Supported Decision-Making

The grants will help achieve the goals of GCDD's Five Year Plan, which is centered around five specific areas: education, employment, formal and informal supports, Real Communities and self-advocacy. Additionally, the Five Year Plan ensures that people with disabilities have more opportunities for

independence, economic self-sufficiency and self-determination.

### 2018 Advocacy Days are Here!

REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN for the 2018 Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Advocacy Days!

We need your help to educate Georgia's lawmakers about topics important to our community, like the DD Waiver Waiting List, Employment, Inclusive Post-Secondary Education, the UNLOCK! Coalition and Medicaid. Join GCDD at the Capitol this legislative session to learn about policies impacting people with disabilities and join advocates from across the State in speaking with elected officials about these very important issues.

More information and how to register on page 10.

### Take the GCDD Communications Survey!

GCDD wants to know how you get your information from the Council. This survey will help us grow and improve the way we communicate with you.

Take the survey at: [bit.ly/GCDDsurvey](http://bit.ly/GCDDsurvey)

The survey closes 1/31/2018.

### GCDD Storytelling Project

GCDD is seeking Georgians with developmental disabilities to take part in our storytelling project. The goal of the project is to amplify the voices of people with developmental disabilities in Georgia. Parents and caregivers are welcome to participate

along with the individual. These stories will be instrumental in the efforts of GCDD to advocate for Georgians living with developmental disabilities. Stories and photos will be shared with the media, elected officials and other stakeholders. Think you or someone you know might be eligible? Please contact us at [DDstorytellingGA@gmail.com](mailto:DDstorytellingGA@gmail.com) or 470-344-6073.

## Georgia Disability History Symposium Examines Past Lessons to Lead Future Advocacy

Preserving, celebrating and learning from Georgia's rich disability history helps future generations understand the importance of disability rights advocacy. The Georgia Disability History Alliance (GDHA) held the Georgia Disability History Symposium: Urgency of the Moment in November 2017 at the Russell Building Special Collections Libraries in Athens, GA. Support and service providers, advocates, UGA faculty and students, individuals with disabilities and others, including National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities' (NACDD) CEO Donna Meltzer and Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' (GCDD) Executive Director Eric Jacobson, attended the half-day symposium to address the urgency of learning from the state's disability history.

"Georgia's historical part in the disability rights movement has been central to informing and creating change," said Gillian Grable, one of the GDHA's founders.

Highlighting major events in Georgia's disability history, Mark Johnson, director of advocacy at the Shepherd Center, touched on early ADAPT protests, the importance of the 1999 United



States Supreme Court case *Olmstead v. L.C.* and 2017's "No Cuts, No Caps" demonstrations to save Medicaid. Johnson showcased how past advocacy has changed public policy and the differences it has made presently.

Dr. Beth Mount, author and founder of Graphic Futures, a consulting organization, stressed the importance of person-centered planning by creating opportunities and relationships that will highlight a person's gifts, especially in Georgia.

"Make [gifts] and capacities visible and find places where those gifts are needed," Mount said. "Build alliances that will sustain their contributions and be the ally that brings to life what other people feel so strongly about."

Mount explained how the urgency of seeing that potential will aid in taking on a system, which for years was a form of constraint.

Discussing the pervasive effects of social exclusion and control, John O'Brien, former citizen advocacy planner of the Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO) and author, spoke of the history of people with disabilities being pushed aside and "living on the margins."

O'Brien reiterated the importance of investing in people and organizations who offer direct supports. He also examined how the gap that's been created by the system can be bridged in the future by putting in place social resources and relationships for those who have been excluded or segregated.

In a panel discussion, GCDD Council members Parker Glick and Evan Nodvin, as well as Basmat Ahmed, executive director of Al-Tamyoz Community Building, a Real Communities partner, observed that younger generations are beginning to challenge

notions that people historically had about people with disabilities.

“We want to empower youth,” Glick said. “Success [to us] looks like a conversation with an individual, seeing our perspective and not being an afterthought.”

GCDD, along with the Albany Advocacy Resource Center, the Center for Social Justice, Human and Civil Rights at UGA, Georgia Microboards Association and Easterseals of Southern Georgia, sponsored the symposium.

## FEATURE STORY 1

### PUBLIC POLICY FOR THE PEOPLE:

2018 Georgia General Assembly: Ready or Not, Here We Come!

by Dawn Alford and Hanna Rosenfeld

Made up of both the House of Representatives (180 members) and the Senate (56 members), the Georgia General Assembly serves as the State of Georgia’s legislative body. Charged with making the laws that govern the Peach State, the Georgia General Assembly meets for one 40-day legislative session each year, always starting the second Monday in January. The end date remains a bit of a mystery since the 40 days need not be continuous and are often spread out over a three-month period.

The Georgia General Assembly runs on a two-year cycle. We are on year two, meaning that any bill introduced last year is still active this session. The two-year cycle also refers to the fact

that all the members must run for re-election every two years. Keeping in mind that many of our elected officials will be anxious to get back to their re-election campaigns, we imagine this will be a short legislative session.

Not only will we be re-electing our entire Georgia General Assembly in the fall, but we will also be electing a new Governor, as well as many other statewide office positions. With Governor Nathan Deal constrained by term limits, this will be our current Governor's last chance to sign or veto legislation as a part of his legacy.

As the Georgia General Assembly reconvenes in 2018, they will be confronted with an ever-growing Georgia of 10.3 million people, over half of which cluster around the Greater Metro Atlanta area. While some needs are specific to rural or urban areas, many of the challenges facing Georgia, such as healthcare, education and the opioid epidemic, are statewide. According to the Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, Georgia plans to leverage \$25 billion in state funding to draw down an additional \$13.9 billion in federal funds, as well as \$6.4 billion in other funds, for a total operating budget of \$45.2 billion. More than two-thirds of Georgia's budget goes to education and healthcare. Of the \$13.9 billion in federal funds Georgia relies on, \$7.7 billion is for Medicaid and PeachCare. The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities' (DBHDD) 2018 Budget was \$1.1 billion, of which \$349.4 million went towards developmental disabilities services.

## What happened last year?

Before discussing the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)'s legislative priorities for the 2018 Georgia General Assembly, let's take a brief moment to review a key outcome from the 2017 Georgia legislative session.

You may recall that in 2017 no additional funding was added to the state's budget for additional DD waivers beyond that which was required from the Department of Justice (DOJ) Extension of Settlement Agreement with Georgia. While providing funding to support individuals' transition from the state hospitals is of critical importance, it does very little to actually address the thousands of individuals and families that are languishing away on the DD waiver waiting list.

According to data provided by the Department of Community Health, there are 8,658 individuals waiting for a Medicaid NOW or COMP waiver as of September 30, 2017.

In response to the waiting list, many of you joined GCDD to advocate for DBHDD come up with a multi-year plan to eliminate this waiting list. Our advocacy was successful and the following budget language was added to the State Fiscal Year 2017 budget:

57.15 The department shall develop and report to the Georgia General Assembly on a multi-year plan to reduce and eliminate the waiting list for NOW and COMP waivers with yearly outcome measures by December 31, 2017.

At the end of last year, DBHDD shared the draft of the aforementioned plan and sought input from GCDD. As of the publication deadline for this article, the final plan was being revised by DBHDD. Once DBHDD's plan has been submitted

officially to the legislature and is made public, GCDD will let you know where you can find it and read the details for yourself. GCDD will also use the information provided by this report to better inform our advocacy strategy and specific legislative asks for the 2018 session.

As always, GCDD remains committed to our mission of promoting public policy that creates an integrated life within the community for people with developmental disabilities, their families, and those who love them. This year we will focus our efforts on the following:

### [2018 Legislative Priorities – Led by GCDD](#)

#### DD Waivers

As long as there is a DD waiver waiting list, GCDD remains committed to reducing and hopefully eliminating that waiting list. These waivers allow individuals with developmental disabilities who qualify for an institutional level of care to receive the support they need in their community surrounded by their loved ones. Wouldn't we all rather live in a real home in the community with the supports we need to live an independent life? No one wants to be shut away in an institutional setting.

#### Integrated Employment

Employment provides a meaningful way for people with disabilities to spend their day, an outlet to share their gifts and talents, and even some financial independence. GCDD is committed to expanding competitive, integrated employment opportunities for Georgians with disabilities and reducing the

barriers to employment people with disabilities encounter on a regular basis.

#### Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE)

Historically, individuals with developmental disabilities have had very limited, if any, options for pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities. Inclusive programs have improved that landscape. GCDD believes that all students, regardless of ability, should have access to post-secondary education programs throughout the State of Georgia. These inclusive post-secondary programs provide students with intellectual and development disabilities access to education not otherwise available.

#### Children's Freedom Initiative

Many people do not realize that there are still children with disabilities in Georgia who currently reside in either a skilled nursing facility or a private institution. GCDD believes that all children deserve a permanent loving home. We at GCDD are committed to removing the barriers that result in children growing up in nursing facilities or private institutions.

#### Medicaid

Many people with disabilities rely on direct care professionals to assist them in their daily activities and to maintain their independence. Medicaid home and community-based services are the lifeline to these and other necessary services on which people with disabilities rely. Therefore, GCDD is committed to preventing cuts, caps or other reductions to Medicaid funding in Georgia that would put the lives of people with disabilities at risk.

## GCDD Supports Our Partners:

### Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC)

ADRCs are a coordinated system of partnering organizations that are dedicated to providing accurate information about publicly and privately financed long-term supports and services to people who are aging or who experience disability. The Georgia Council on Aging is advocating for \$4 million to strengthen the ADRC network by adding capacity to meet the growing demand for this crucial information.

### Elder & Disabled Abuser Registry

The Georgia Council on Aging is advocating for the creation of an Abuser Registry in Georgia to help prevent the hiring of caregivers with a known history of abusing vulnerable adults.

### Standard of Proof for Intellectual Disability

The PAPE (Proof to A Preponderance of the Evidence) coalition is working to lower the standard to prove intellectual disability in capital punishment cases to “preponderance of the evidence,” which is the standard used in most other states.

### UNLOCK! Coalition

The Unlock! Coalition is a cross disability coalition that advocates for community integration in its many forms. The GCDD proudly supports the Unlock! Coalition. For more information, visit [www.gcdd.org/unlock/](http://www.gcdd.org/unlock/)

## Federal/State Interplay

This has been a year filled with advocacy on the federal level. Many of the bills currently being discussed in Washington, DC have significant impacts on Georgians with disabilities. It will come as no surprise that much of what is occurring in

Washington, DC impacts the activities of the Georgia General Assembly. You have probably heard the US Congress recently passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Among other things, this new tax system lowers corporate tax rates, as well as lowers taxes for most Americans with the largest cuts going to the most wealthy. While GCDD is not here to pass judgment on the merits of trickle-down economics, GCDD is concerned that lower federal taxes may mean less federal revenue.

If you recall earlier in this article, we mentioned that Georgia relies on about \$13.9 billion in federal funding each year, most of which goes to programs like Medicaid and PeachCare (Medicaid for kids, otherwise known as CHIP). This means that if the federal government has less money to spend, Georgia may receive less money to fund these programs. We know how important Medicaid is for people with disabilities. Should less money come down from Washington, DC to fund these critical programs, the State of Georgia will be faced with many tough decisions.

Dawn Alford is the GCDD Public Policy Director.

Hanna Rosenfeld is the GCDD Planning and Policy Development Specialist.

[A Look at GCDD's 2018 Legislative Priorities:](#)

Led by GCDD . . .

| DD Waivers

| Integrated Employment

| Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE)



- | Children's Freedom Initiative
- | Medicaid
- GCDD Supports Our Partners . . .
- | Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC)
- | Elder & Disabled Abuser Registry
- | Standard of Proof for Intellectual Disability
- | UNLOCK! Coalition

### Some Key Dates:

- | January 8: The first day of the legislative session.
- | January 11: The Governor presents his proposed budget to Georgia General Assembly.
- | The 28th Legislative Day: Crossover Day, which means this is the last day for a bill to pass from one chamber to another.
- | The 40th Legislative Day: Sine Die, otherwise known as the last day of the legislative session.

### Get Involved!

Register for GCDD's 2018 Advocacy Days

Once you have prepared your story, go to [gcdd.org/public-policy/2018-advocacy-days.html](http://gcdd.org/public-policy/2018-advocacy-days.html) so you can learn how to tell your story to your elected officials. Make your voice count!

Subscribe to Receive GCDD's Advocacy Alerts

Make sure to visit [www.gcdd.org](http://www.gcdd.org) to ensure you are subscribed to receive our advocacy alerts so you will continue to receive the most updated information.

## Questions or Concerns? Just Ask!

Feel free to reach out to GCDD directly with any questions or concerns you have about advocacy or public policy as it relates to Georgians with disabilities. Visit [gcdd.org/about/staff.html](http://gcdd.org/about/staff.html) and contact Dawn or Hanna.

### ADVOCACY 101: Sharing your Story

Undoubtedly, the act of telling your own story is one of the strongest forms of advocacy out there. Data, graphs and statistics are all well and good, but they are so impersonal. They don't stay with you in the same way an emotional appeal does. Making a personal connection and helping another person walk a moment in your shoes is powerful and long-lasting.

Remember, the Georgia General Assembly is tasked with making laws to better the lives of Georgia's citizens. It is important we put a face and a story to the over 10 million people who call Georgia home.

To help you structure your story, here are a few storytelling tips that hold true whether you are sharing your story in person or through paper and pen.

1. Keep your story short. If the legislator has questions, they will ask.
2. Be sure to introduce yourself, share where you are from, and why you are sharing your story.
3. Share why the issue is important to you. What will happen if this proposed law is passed and what will happen if this proposed law is not passed.

4. Keep it simple. Remember the legislator does not need to know everything about you and your situation, just hit the key points.
5. Remember, you are the expert on your life. This means you are also the best person to tell your story.

## 2018 Advocacy Days

Register NOW for the 2018 Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Advocacy Days!

Join GCDD at the Capitol this legislative session to learn about policies affecting people with disabilities and join advocates from across the State in speaking with elected officials about these very important issues. We need your help to educate Georgia's lawmakers about topics important to our community, like the DD Waiver Waiting List, Employment, Inclusive Post-Secondary Education, the UNLOCK! Coalition and Medicaid. Register early to secure your spot!

[www.eventbrite.com/e/2018-gcdd-advocacy-days-registration-40146345801](http://www.eventbrite.com/e/2018-gcdd-advocacy-days-registration-40146345801)

## Dates & Topics of 2018 Advocacy Days

- Advocacy Day #1 DD Waivers (January 23) - If you are on the waiting list for a NOW/COMP waiver OR you are currently enjoying the benefits of the waiver, then this is the day for you.
- Advocacy Day #2 Employment (January 31) - Let's talk JOBS. Come educate your legislator about your integrated and paid community job, or the barriers standing in your way!

- Advocacy Day #3 Medicaid (February 14) - Medicaid is the lifeline for people with disabilities to live in their community. Come join us in educating our legislators about the importance of Medicaid in our lives. Remember in GA, Medicaid goes by many names: NOW/COMP Waiver, ICWP, CCSP, SOURCE, Katie Beckett and GAPP, just to name a few.
- Advocacy Day #4 Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs (February 22) - If you attend, graduated from, or hope to one day attend one of GA's Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs, then this is your day!
- Advocacy Day #5 UNLOCK! Coalition (February 28) - Join the UNLOCK! Coalition down at the Capitol to educate legislators on the importance of community integration.
- Advocacy Day #6 Medicaid (March 15) - Medicaid is the lifeline for people with disabilities to live in their community. Come join us in educating our legislators about the importance of Medicaid in our lives. Remember in GA, Medicaid goes by many names: NOW/COMP Waiver, ICWP, CCSP, SOURCE, Katie Beckett and GAPP, just to name a few.

Time: All advocacy days will run from 8:30 AM till approximately 12:30 PM

Location: Central Presbyterian Church across from the Georgia State Capitol at 201 Washington Street SW, Atlanta, GA 30303

### Daily Schedule Overview

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 8:30 - 9:00  | Arrival and registration                           |
| 9:00 - 9:20  | Welcome and understand the Legislative Ask         |
| 9:20 - 9:40  | Demonstration of a visit with a legislator         |
| 9:40 - 10:10 | Break into teams to practice the Legislative Visit |

10:10 - 12:30 Go to the State Capitol in teams to call legislators to the ropes

### Frequently Asked Questions:

Are there ID requirements to enter the event?

Bring photo identification. You will need it to pass through security in the Capitol.

What are my transportation/  
parking options for getting to and from the event?

MARTA: Take Blue line to Georgia State MARTA Transit station and use the MLK Jr. Drive exit. Head right on MLK Jr. Drive for 1.5 blocks. Central Presbyterian Church will be on the corner of MLK Jr. Drive and Washington Street.

Parking options:

Steve Polk Plaza

65 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, Atlanta, GA – Located near Underground Atlanta & Georgia Railroad Freight Depot.

Capitol Lot Daily

218 Capitol Avenue, Atlanta, GA

Located on Capitol Avenue near the State Capitol.

Pete Hackney

162 Jesse Hill Jr., Drive, Atlanta, GA – Located at the corner of Jesse Hill Jr. Drive and Decatur Street.

Underground Deck A  
75 MLK Jr Dr SW,  
Atlanta, GA 30303

What can I not bring into the event?

Weapons are not allowed in the State Capitol. Please leave all knives, guns and other such items at home.

What if I don't know who my State Senator or State Representative is? Find out at [www.openstates.org](http://www.openstates.org)

Who can I contact the with any questions?

Contact Stacey Ramirez at [SRamirez@TheArc.org](mailto:SRamirez@TheArc.org)

## MIA'S SPACE

### Focus on the Truth

By Pat Nobbie, PhD, Mia's mom

Every once in a while, universes converge – in a short span of time, the same message emerges from multiple sources and this is both unsettling and confirming.

In October, I was in Athens for Mia's birthday, and it was magical. She met the UGA football team and got her picture taken with quarterback Jake Fromm. Laura's third baby, Tate, arrived in the wee hours just after her birthday and she held him in the hospital where she works when he was just eight

hours old. We gathered all her friends at Applebee's for the traditional birthday dinner; and attended a costumed fall festival with the families she has grown up with.

It was at this event that another mom and I had a conversation about "what to do?" What to do about the young people who surrounded us at the festival who wanted jobs, wanted to move on from their parent's homes, knowing there was a multi-year waiting list for any type of support from the State? Could we do it ourselves, she wondered? Could we work with someone to start businesses, figure out shared living, and not wait on the system?

Not too much later, I was at the TASH conference in Atlanta and heard the same message from Rod and Ann Turnbull as they shared "truths" from their son's well-lived life. Ann's message was to pick two or three truths and focus on them. As parents, we often don't get the luxury of selecting what to focus on – things happen and we deal with them. But this message, following on what my mom friends in Athens wonder, and then reaffirmed with what another group of mom friends presented at a TASH session called "Advocates, Leaders, Friends," reinforced what I already believe. But it was equally unsettling because it challenges us. Here's the thing. WE KNOW WHAT TO DO. We know how school inclusion works and why it is so valuable; we know how to create community around people; we know the most successful employment practices. We know the barriers imposed by outdated policies and regulations and how they should be changed. We know how even a little financial support can go a long way to supporting people to have "an enviable life." And, we actually know how good

practice and some investment saves money in the long run. What's unsettling is the inertia of the administrative and political systems. Over my years of work, I have alternately advocated for systems to provide what people need and done an end-run around them. I suppose we will always have to do both. Not everyone has activists in their corner. And innovations need system support to be sustainable. So as we go concurrently into the 2018 Georgia Legislative Session and the next round of Congress, recognize system impact and don't lose your capacity for outrage. Choose another "truth" that has meaning for you ... but, don't postpone joy.

Happy New Year!

10 Truths from 150 (or 200) Years or So of Our Lives

- Seek an enviable life.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Create your own village.
- Go boldly into the unknown.
- Be accountable for the whole life.
- Breathe some.
- Recognize system impact.
- Never lose your capacity for outrage.
- Pursue dignity diligently.
- Never postpone joy.

Credit: From Ann and Rod Turnbull's Keynote at TASH, 12.14.2017, (loosely recorded!)



## FEATURE STORY 2

### Employees with Disabilities Take Legislators to Work

By Jennifer Bosk

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) has made integrated employment of individuals with disabilities a top goal in its Five Year Plan. That's why State Representative Sheila Jones (D-District 53) saw first-hand how Matthew Roush, an operations analyst at SunTrust, has been so impactful to his team. The visit was part of GCDD's third annual Take Your Legislator to Work Day (TYLTWD), which kicked off during October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM).

TYLTWD is an opportunity for employees with disabilities in Georgia to invite their legislator(s) to visit them at work. The goal is to show the far-reaching benefits to employers, employees and communities alike of hiring people with disabilities and create opportunities to form and nurture relationships with their elected officials.

#### Forming Relationships

Through a partnership program between Briggs & Associates and Atlanta Public Schools, Matthew Roush interned in several different departments at SunTrust. He is now a permanent employee with benefits. The SunTrust team learned what Roush needs to be successful; accommodated his visual impairment by providing double monitors with large text that

enable him to work as efficiently as possible; and supports his growth as a person and an employee.

His job as an operations analyst includes data entry, document scanning and monitoring quality control while using assistive technology to help with his visual impairment. Roush also has a hearing impairment and an intellectual disability.

Through TYLTWD, Rep. Jones met Roush, visited his workplace and spoke to him about his job duties and great coworkers.

“I was so thrilled when I received the invitation to participate in this special day. I enjoyed the time I spent at work with Matthew. It was great to see him at his desk working on a computer and using the scanner without assistance. It showed me that with job training, people with disabilities can perform their job just like everyone else. Matthew’s work is necessary and needed at the company where he is working,” said Rep. Jones.

In Peachtree Corners, GA, Jack Prettyman welcomed State Representative Scott Hilton (R-District 95) to his place of work, Wesleyan School, to advocate and show the work he does as a member of the facilities and ground crew.

Prettyman, 23, who is diagnosed with Down syndrome, works weekdays from 8 AM to noon and is one of the busiest people on Wesleyan’s campus. He walks nearly 15,000 steps a day crossing the grounds while he handles recycling, sweeping mats, mopping the gym floor, setting up cafeteria tables and dusting benches.

He also took Rep. Hilton on a full campus tour, pointing out sites at the private school as well as his job duties.

“It was awesome to see the critical role Jack plays in Wesleyan’s operations. Jack is a valuable member of the team,” Rep. Hilton said. “I loved the positive impact he has on everyone around him from students, faculty and administration. It was great to see the joy Jack experienced in his work environment – the work is really important to him. “I am proud of Wesleyan School for seeing opportunities to employ those with disabilities.”

### GCDD’s Goal

The Council is working to strengthen meaningful employment opportunities that include a livable wage with career advancement; strengthen financial inclusion and asset development efforts for individuals with developmental disabilities; and educate businesses about the diverse workforce.

State Senator Elena Parent (D-District 42) agrees. “I’d like to see more businesses recognize that hiring individuals with disabilities is a win-win. My biggest takeaway was that jobs for people with disabilities are vital. The business gets a dedicated employee and the employee gets self-confidence and a sense of purpose.”

Sen. Parent spent TYLTWD with Christine Sass at Taziki’s Mediterranean Café located in Decatur. Sass, 26, is diagnosed with autism and cerebral palsy.

“Christine is doing great work for Taziki’s. She knows her duties and moves through them efficiently. The job also gives her the ability to practice her interpersonal skills and to be part of a team,” Parent explained.

“I prepare the dining room for opening,” Sass said, which includes tasks such as putting down chairs, wiping down tables, rolling and placing silverware, bagging cookies, setting up the drink machine and sweeping the floor.

To Sass, the best part of her job is getting paid and adds the greatest thing about the company she works for is that her colleagues are friendly.

Through her experience and opportunity, Sass wants people to know that, “People with disabilities want to work; but, it is important to find the right job.”

### The Legislative Impact

While building these meaningful relationships are important and benefit both the employer and employee, TYLTWD allows elected officials to understand the positive impact of publicly funded employment supports when they see people with disabilities in action.

Rep. Hilton, who participated for the first time in TYLTWD, shared that he “would love to see the Georgia legislature find ways to incentivize the private sector to encourage the hiring of individuals with disabilities.”

Georgia has begun focusing more on employment for people with disabilities. While a handful of organizations are working on finding employment for individuals with developmental disabilities, the work needed to make Employment First happen in Georgia continues to need a strong advocate push – engaging with both the community and legislators about employment issues.

Employment First is an approach to promote the full inclusion of individuals with varying degrees of abilities in the workplace and in the community. Currently 32 states have an official Employment First policy (based on legislation, policy directives, etc.).

While Georgia has Employment First efforts and initiatives underway, no official policy has been created just yet to make integrated employment the preferred service option.

Sen. Parent also explained that the legislature needs to make progress in eliminating the backlog of people waiting for Medicaid waivers, which can enable more people to take advantage of employment.

In 2014, the Home and Community Based Settings (HCBS) Rule, passed down from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, focused entirely on community living and inclusion. The HCBS waivers work to make sure individuals are given full access to the greater community – including opportunities for competitive and integrated employment, a community life conducive to all abilities, control over their own finances and the same services anyone receives.

The passage of the HCBS Rule in 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act are all shoring up support for Employment First practices in Georgia by building a strong foundation for integrated and inclusive communities.

“Passing legislation that has more impact on corporations hiring people with disabilities is a way the legislature can show their support. The legislature can be invited to discussions to find out ways it can be more involved in Take Your Legislator to Work

Day, as well as other programs involving working with people with disabilities,” said Rep. Jones, after her visit with Roush.

### Business Partners

When the question of why Elizabeth Cicerchia wanted to work in early child care came up during State Senator Michael “Doc” Rhett’s (D-District 33) TYLTWD visit, Cicerchia shared that some of the jobs she held previously were simply “just jobs.”

But she knows the work she does at Kids R Kids of West Oak in Marietta is what she wants to do as her career. Cicerchia, 35, is diagnosed with Down syndrome.

When seeing all Cicerchia does on the job, Sen. Rhett said the statement “yes, I can too” comes to mind.

“As a retired educator, I worked with children with disabilities from pre-K through high school. We helped them develop life skills in each grade with the goal of preparing them for gainful employment, just like any other student, upon graduation. The collaboration between the school system, community and business interests is a vital link towards helping anyone contribute in a positive manner to our society,” Sen. Rhett said.

### Advocating for Employment

GCDD believes visiting an employee at work is the best way to show legislators that people with disabilities want to work and are as capable as anyone at working in real jobs for real wages. The legislators shared how TYLTWD showed them the win-win results of employees with disabilities and the employers who hire them including the positive impact it makes on all communities.

“People with disabilities who are willing to work should be given a chance to show that they can and will do the job. I believe it is important for people without disabilities to have an opportunity to see up close people with disabilities doing and enjoying their job,” said Rep. Jones.

To keep the momentum and encourage more community members to advocate for employment for people with disabilities, GCDD will hold its Employment First Advocacy Day during the 2018 legislative session on January 31, 2018.

“Wanting to pursue a career is never a courageous act, regardless of whether the job seeker happens to have a disability or not. We all need help and support in some form or another to do our best, but that human truth doesn’t negate anyone’s potentially amazing contribution to an employer,” said Julie Hicks, the career specialist from Briggs & Associates who coaches Cicerchia.

GCDD thanks all of the employees and employers who participated in [Take Your Legislator to Work Day](#). The Council also recognizes and thanks all of the Georgia legislators who took time to attend and learn about employment options for people with disabilities in their communities.

I Hannah Hibben – visited by Rep. Dale Rutledge at the Great American Cookie Company in McDonough

I Emily Shaw – visited by Rep. Clay Cox at disABILITY LINK in Tucker

I Austin Pahr – visited by Rep. Jason Ridley and Sen. Chuck Payne at Nob North Golf Course in Cohutta

I Christine Sass – visited by Sen. Elena Parent at Taziki’s in Decatur

I Bayley Bristow – visited by Sen. Fran Millar at The Elaine Clark Center in Chamblee

I Jack Prettyman – visited by Rep. Scott Hilton at the Wesleyan School in Peachtree Corners

I Elizabeth Terzich – visited by Sen. Mike Dugan at the Carroll County Animal Hospital in Carrollton

I Patrick James Barlow – visited by Sen. Steve Henson at the Park Springs Retirement Community in Stone Mountain

I Matthew Roush – visited by Rep. Sheila Jones at SunTrust Bank in Atlanta

I Mikel Miller – visited by Rep. J. Collins at the Ingles in Villa Rica

I Tyler Blanton – visited by Rep. Steve Tarvin at Unique Fabricating in LaFayette (Visit <http://newschannel9.com/news/local/take-your-legislature-to-work-day-provides-unique-opportunities-to-access-WTVC-Channel-9-ABC-news>)

I Katrina Parsons visited by Rep. Beth Beskin at disABILITY LINK in Tucker

I Elizabeth Cicerchia – visited by Sen. Michael “Doc” Rhett at the Kids R Kids Pre-School in Marietta

I Project Search Interns Reuben Stephen, Nick Brundidge, Rayshun Grant, Rashaan Davis, Darrius Elias, Tionna Evans, Sam Thomas and Deshunte Banks – visited by Rep. Carolyn Hugley at TSYS in Columbus

I Project Search Interns: Te’Airra Simpson, Zitavia Freeman, Kemma Paulk, Jimmy Lee Holliman and Iesha Curtis – visited by



Rep. Dominic LaRiccia at the Coffee Regional Medical Center in Douglas

I Michelle Phoenix – visited by Rep. Mickey Stephens at Rise Biscuits & Donuts in Savannah

I Project Search Interns and Graduates: Brian Odom, Marnell McGill, Arthur Arnold, Herman Curry, Derrick Edwards and Gary Ceasar – visited by Rep. Darlene Taylor at Archbold Medical Center in Thomasville

## EXPERT UPDATE

### [Creating the Gold Standard of Disability Hiring](#)

This is an excerpt from Randy Lewis' talk at the Impact Business Speaker Series at Georgia Tech's Scheller College of Business. My son, Austin, has autism. He didn't speak until he was age 10. He's trying to make up for lost time if you ever get a chance to talk to him. He was the first student with autism to go to his school. He drives. He's sometimes my chauffeur to the airport. He has a great sense of humor. He has no friends. He has never been invited to a party and never received an email. He probably reads at about a fifth-grade level. I've never played a game with my own son. Not even a game of catch. And most people like him would never be offered a job.

[A job can mean the difference in life.](#) Security, friendships, possibilities. But when it comes to getting a job – what I do know as a parent and as an employer – is that people with

disabilities die the death of 1,000 cuts. The unkindest of which is a belief by most people that people with disabilities really can't do the job. It's a great thing to do if you can afford it, but otherwise it's a charity thing to do and that's what I knew [Walgreens] was facing.

We started out trying to hire some people with disabilities. We hired some groups who were bringing in people with disabilities and we gave them certain tasks to do. We were getting them team member T-shirts, name badges just like everyone else. I remember this woman comes up to me, in our Dallas center, and she shows me a picture. Now, I didn't know if she worked for us or was part of the group, but she must have seen the confusion on my face because she followed with, "Oh, I'm not one of them. I'm their sponsor."

"Them."

*It struck me like a slap in the face.* Those folks were not doing traditional jobs, they weren't earning the same pay, and they weren't with "us." So, I knew we had to do better.

So, we said, let's ask for volunteers who would like to work with some of the folks in that group, let's hire them and give them a chance.

One of the people that we hired was a man named Chuck. Chuck is on the [autism] spectrum. He had graduated from college with a degree in accounting. He had never been able to get a job, but we hired him. We learned that Chuck's favorite color was purple because every time a purple token would pass through his area, Chuck would stop, let out a yell of joy, and start dancing. Something we had never seen.

So maybe this is something we can tolerate in a work environment? Which would we prefer from our employees?

Dancing or complaining? Easy choice – dancing.

Perhaps there's a group of people out there like us who could do the job, but would never be allowed to because of these invisible walls we have around ourselves.

So, we decided that if we're going to hire people with disabilities, we're going to start with jobs. And we want a big number, because if this works, we want to be able to demonstrate to the world that people with disabilities can perform as well as anybody else.

If we hire one or two, people can say, "That's great, Walgreens. You're a big company. You can afford that." We wanted to demonstrate that beyond a reasonable doubt, people with disabilities can do the job – and not just jobs for people with disabilities.

Business is not a charity. We have shareholders that are just as demanding as any other company. People with disabilities had to do the same job, receive the same pay and be evaluated on the same performance scale. We needed to measure it, so that's why we said one-third of the workforce had to be people with disabilities. We said we're going to change the way people view people with disabilities.

We changed our hiring process. Traditionally, we would put an application out there, and we'd screen them using a computer. We'd pre-screen them, call them up on the phone, have a little

pre-interview, and you get called in for a final interview. That's the process. But we knew people with disabilities, people like Austin, would never be able to get through that process. We needed an alternative.

Now, my son, Austin, exposed me to all the challenges, but he also exposed me to all the possibilities and opened up my thinking. That's how we knew what we had to do. We needed a way for people with disabilities who can demonstrate their ability to do the job in nontraditional ways.

[We found an expert on people with disabilities.](#) We asked them to find 200 people for our Anderson, South Carolina center – 75 on day one and 10 a month thereafter. They understood our jobs, went out and then did the pre-screening. They found the people that they thought would be successful in our environment. Then, we would bring them in, provide the job coaches, and Walgreens would provide supervision and let them do the work on a trial basis. We'd pay them during this period and when they're successful, we hire them.

[One of the people who heard about this was Desiree,](#) who lived in San Diego. Desiree has a rare muscle condition that requires she use a walker every once in a while. She packed up her bags, moved her family across the country a year – a year – before we opened, just for the chance to be in line. She's a manager at that building today. A person who we would have never hired, because we would have assumed that it would be too difficult for her to get to all the parts of the building, is now a manager of the center in South Carolina.

People ask, “How did this turn out?” This turned out to be the most productive center in the 100-year history of our company. What we had hoped to achieve worked. People with disabilities perform the same work safer and have less workers compensation costs. That’s a big concern among employers. We also heard, “It’s going to cost more,” or “This is more dangerous, so there are going to be more accidents,” or “Their health costs are going to go up.” Again, these are things that are claimed, but have no evidence in data. We did not find that. Our healthcare costs did not go up, it was the same. Our retention was better and our absenteeism was less.

The center is the most productive in the company’s history. Over 30% of the workforce has a disability. Most had never been able to secure a steady job before. Within four years, over 1,000 people with disabilities were working in centers across the country.

This is a group that shows up. This is all that we hoped for.

Randy Lewis, former Sr. Vice President of Walgreens, Peace Corps volunteer, Fortune 50 executive and accidental advocate, led Walgreens’ logistics division for sixteen years as the chain grew from 1,500 to 8,000 stores. Lewis introduced an inclusive model in Walgreens distribution centers that resulted in 10% of its workforce consisting of people with disabilities who are held to the same standards as those without disabilities. Its success has changed the lives of thousands with and without disabilities and is serving as a model for other employers in the US and abroad. He is pictured above with his son, Austin.

## PERSPECTIVES

### Take Advantage of Opportunities

By Beth Beskin

I decided to participate in Take Your Legislator To Work Day because Katrina [Parsons] reached out to me. My decision to attend was based on the fact that not only was I invited, but I was going to meet a constituent of mine who was working at disability Link.

As legislators, we get many invitations, but we can't accept them all. So, it really made a difference that the personal invitation was tailored to me, and that I was going to be interacting with Katrina, a constituent of mine.

I was really impressed with my experience this year because I got to participate in a job training skills session. Katrina led a meeting and there were probably 10-15 participants in the room. I was able to actively participate in learning from the attendees, giving them some advice that I think might help them as they work to get a job offer. I thought it was a very constructive environment.

This is a form of advocacy, so as a legislator, it makes an impact when you have a role as a decision maker or elected official. It can shape the way we might support competitive employment or employment for people with disabilities in the legislature.

I've been aware of this need for a long time, because I served on the Region 3 Planning Board of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities from about 2011 until I got elected to the legislature in 2015. I've been aware of the disability community and its need for services and for the importance in terms of allocation of assets.

These experiences prompt me to be sensitive to any bills that come across this session as they relate to the disability community and to apply my experiences from this program to my consideration of those bills. When it comes to my colleagues, especially those who have never participated in this program, I would encourage them to meet their constituents because this is someone in your district, and it is an issue that is important to them.

[Take Your Legislator to Work Day](#) has been a very positive experience for me. I don't know if there is a program in every district, every house district across the State, but to the extent that there are constituents who are working in this program, I would highly encourage legislators to take advantage of the opportunity.

At the same time, there is a personal takeaway. Participating in this initiative confirms my prior impression that there is a large disability community here in Georgia and everyone is working to find suitable and meaningful employment. We need to support everyone to be the most independent person they can be and work together to facilitate that public good.

[Rep. Beth Beskin](#) represents State House District 54 in the Georgia General Assembly. She serves as a member of the Education Committee, Judiciary Committee, Regulated Industries Committee, State Planning and Community Affairs Committee, and the MARTOC Committee. She serves as Chair of the MARTOC Governance Subcommittee and as Vice Chair of the Education Subcommittee on Innovation and Workforce Development. Beskin has participated in two Take Your Legislator to Work Days.

## [Profound Impact of Supported Employment](#)

By Blake Hall

When I was made aware of Take Your Legislator to Work Day (TYLTWD), Matthew Roush was the first person that came to my mind. I first thought of Matt because it was he who first helped me to understand what supported employment is supposed to look like in an integrated and competitive environment, like SunTrust.

When I presented the idea to Matt, he was absolutely thrilled to be a part of it. Even more so, his supervisors and co-workers became completely invested in making sure that TYLTWD was the type of event that Matt deserves. Everyone worked together to make sure that Rep. Sheila Jones was accommodated and warmly welcomed, but most importantly, that Matt and his accomplishments were the center of attention.

The event went exceptionally well, as Matt was able to share what his work has meant to him, and his co-workers were able



to open up about the positive personal impacts they've experienced from sharing an office with a person who has a disability. Being able to partake in such a powerful display of recognition for someone as hardworking as Matt served as a personal reminder of why I accepted the task of being a Career Specialist at Briggs & Associates.

I took the position at Briggs & Associates in September of 2016 when I moved to Atlanta. Upon researching the company, their philosophy became clear: to promote inclusivity and integration into the community through meaningful careers for those living with disabilities. Having worked at a day center for adults with disabilities previously, it was obvious that working with Briggs & Associates would be the most logical next step in my passionate pursuit of helping individuals live their best possible lives.

The position of a Career Specialist felt like an amazing dream come true to me. During my first week of training, it was Matt who helped me to see the Briggs' philosophy in practice. Being able to work alongside of and help to empower people living with disabilities is what initially brought me to this field. Since working with Briggs & Associates, I have been able to do that within a capacity that I never imagined until being introduced to the profound impact of supported employment.

It is this profound impact that I hope was also introduced to Rep. Shelia Jones. It is my wish that she was able to see that employment for people with disabilities can mean a wide variety of jobs, and that there is a population of individuals who have been historically limited in their pursuits, but are becoming increasingly empowered to enter boldly into their communities to work and live alongside of everyone else.

The choice to embrace supported employment is beneficial for all involved. It gives employers the opportunity to utilize dedicated, hard working and special individuals to their maximum potential, while simultaneously allowing those individuals to feel the same sense of accomplishment and belonging that each and every one of us deserves to experience.

Blake Hall is a Career Specialist with Briggs & Associates and lives in Atlanta, GA. Hall began working in the disabilities field directly after graduating from White County High School in Cleveland, GA. Blake's experience in multiple settings within the disabilities field and his passion for advocating for individuals with disabilities ultimately led him to the Supported Employment field. Blake is currently studying psychology at the University of North Georgia and enjoys playing music and traveling with his wife in his spare time.

## REAL COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIPS

### [The Restorative Process for Strong Communities](#)

Sumaya Karimi is the GCDD Real Communities organizing director

Since Real Communities Partnerships are based on community building where people with different abilities, races and backgrounds come together to create a welcoming environment; the Georgia Council on Developmental

Disabilities (GCDD) recommends schools use Restorative Discipline to reduce the disproportional use of punishment experienced by students with disabilities and other marginalized populations. Restorative Justice takes the form of Restorative Discipline (RD) in school-based settings. Trust and relationship building is essential to the restorative process. Sometimes conflict can arise in spaces where people live, work and learn together.

A mother in rural Georgia shared that her son's school calls her daily complaining that Jeremiah cannot sit still. He has been suspended multiple times and she misses work to take him home. If this school had practiced Restorative Discipline, they would have facilitated a circle in which Jeremiah's mother, classmates, teacher and school community members would be invited into dialogue. The restorative circle would then allow the group to generate suggestions and lend support.

The circle dialogue could reveal that sitting still is not something Jeremiah's peers need in order to complete their classwork and so the enforcement might not be necessary. Unfortunately, it is common for schools to not invite students to support the teacher and contribute to the environment of the class. However, the RD process can lead students to take initiative in creating a safe and healthy environment for their class.

Although conflict is natural, it can lead to some harsh realities such as disconnectedness and exclusion and even violence when trust hasn't been built. Marieke Van Wonkdom said, "if we do not build the communities there is nothing to restore." Wonkdom works at Morningside Center as a trainer and coach

using Social Emotional Learning and RD to strengthen school communities.

RD uses a circle approach which is grounded in Native American philosophy and practice. Respectful listening without interruption is central to the circle. As explained on the website of the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue (IRJ&RD):

“Restorative Discipline is a whole-school relational approach to building school climate and addressing student behavior that fosters belonging over exclusion, social engagement over control, and meaningful accountability over punishment. This replaces fear, uncertainty and punishment as motivators with belonging, connectedness and willingness to change because people matter to each other.”

This practice also creates a natural and safe space for students to connect, build relationships and take responsibility. Once the well-being of others matters to everyone, suspensions and expulsions decrease while the following are enhanced:

- | Positive, supportive connection with peers
- | Proactive, peaceful classroom environment
- | Self-discipline skills
- | Use of nonviolent communication
- | Sense of responsibility and accountability

GCDD is hopeful about the potential impact Restorative Justice practices such as the Restorative Discipline Circle could have in reducing inequity and growing connectedness in schools. We remain committed to the idea that through real relationships change occurs and communities are strengthened.

For more information on Restorative Discipline in schools, visit the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue's website at <https://irjrd.org/restorative-discipline-in-schools/>

## Real Communities SPOTLIGHT

### ConnectAbility: Creating a Community of Value, Inclusion and Empowerment in Dahlonega

In Dahlonega, a town of just over 5,000 people, seeing the same faces every day is common. For ConnectAbility, it's not just about seeing those faces, but also getting to know who they are.

As a new Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) Real Communities partner, ConnectAbility looks to create communities where people of all abilities are valued, included and empowered, and where barriers are removed so the entire community can participate.

"We don't have any restrictions on age, diagnosis, location or income," said Jacqueline Daniel, executive director of ConnectAbility. "We're just trying to make everything we do as accessible as possible in every different aspect of life."

Meet Your Neighbor is its latest program. The program partners University of North Georgia students with individuals with disabilities to gather stories from different people in the community. Students from the university, which is located in Dahlonega, also learn valuable team-building lessons and

create lasting relationships that follow them into the real world.

“It’s important to understand the social aspect of somebody’s life and how that works in their community if you’re going to do any work that is truly going to benefit anybody,” said Brianna Brown, project coordinator of Meet Your Neighbor. “When we get to know people, a lot of the barriers and labels we might associate with them are null and void.”

Another program, called 1000 Words, creates teams of photographers who get together to take pictures around town. The goal is to build relationships while taking unique or original photographs related to a central theme. This year’s theme is accessibility.

ConnectAbility has also collaborated with county government to construct a fully accessible playground at a local park. They built the ConnectAbility Bridge by teaming up with local organizations to make that park fully accessible.

Partnering with GCDD, ConnectAbility hopes to engage more with the community; increase social connections for people with disabilities and their families; and make accommodations for those who are facing challenges or struggling in the community.

“We are very excited to have the opportunity to partner with GCDD and Real Communities. It’s exciting for us in a rural area of the State to have the opportunity to learn, grow and to bring their knowledge to our little corner of the world,” Daniel said. “It’s a great privilege and honor to be included in that [Real Communities] partnership.”

For more information on GCDD's Real Communities partner, ConnectAbility visit: [gcdd.org/real-communities/current-partners/connectability-meet-your-neighbor.html](https://gcdd.org/real-communities/current-partners/connectability-meet-your-neighbor.html)

## STRAIGHT TALK

### Carving a Path to Success

By Amara Hazzard

My name is Amara Maria Hazzard, and I am a second year student at the EXCEL program at Georgia Tech. EXCEL is a certificate program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I grew up in Georgia and attended a mostly segregated school, and I took most of my classes with students with disabilities. I began my education taking classes in a regular ed classroom around the time I was in kindergarten through fifth grade.

After that, I went to a lot of different schools and was in Special Ed classes in all of those schools. I took all of my classes with students who had disabilities. I felt like none of the schools helped me, and I felt lost. Then I went to South Gwinnett High School, and there I blossomed. I was still in the separate Special Ed classes, but I felt accepted and even joined the cheerleading team.

I came to Georgia Tech EXCEL, and I really blossomed. I got my first job by myself during my first semester of my first year

here. I know how to get around campus by myself. I'm very, very determined. I want to tell everyone that they can do it, with or without a disability. You can get into college; you can get a job. You can have support if you need it. I met a lot of friends on campus. We go to the mall, plan holiday parties, attend sporting events, cook together and have a great time. Some of my favorite things that I'm doing at college are going to my first frat house party.

[A lot of my friends were there.](#) I volunteer a lot around campus. I'm an events coordinator for GIFTED (God's Influence Flowing Through Every Disciple), a Christian club on campus. I was a member of the cast of "What's Going On, Part 2" that performed the first week of December.

This play was about social justice in the world in the format of stories about a group of college students. I am a member of Caterpillar's Promise, an organization that helps young kids find their way in the world through mentors and workshops. I have led student Open House tours for EXCEL as well as given MARTA transportation training for EXCEL students.

My classes have been great. Some of my favorite learning activities include making a fidget spinner in Collaborative Design class; learning about wheelchair (in-) accessibility around campus sidewalks, streets and classrooms; and learning how to budget my money in Financial Literacy.

One thing that I want to do before I leave college is to continue to maintain a steady job at least ten hours a week during



classes. For my internship in Spring of 2018, I am hoping to be working at the front desk at Lutheran Towers, a senior adult apartment complex. This will give me an opportunity to show my love for people. After college, I would like to have my own apartment, have a job, and live life to the fullest!

I am proud of myself for being an advocate and sharing my story with other young people who are starting to carve their own path for success.

Amara Hazzard is 20 years old, from Loganville, GA. She likes to hang out with her boyfriend, Kenny. She has a large family that spends much time together at family reunions in Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and Pennsylvania. Her favorite color is purple. She cooks a delicious organic pasta sauce and misses her sister, Aria, and their three pets while she is away at college. She hopes to one day soon travel to Las Vegas, NV.

### GCDD ANNOUNCES THREE NOFAS (NOTICE OF FUNDS AVAILABLE)

- Marketing for Inclusive Post-secondary Education
- School to Prison Pipeline
- Technical Assistance Center for Best Practices in Employment Supports

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is requesting proposals for initiatives that will help the Council

achieve the goals outlined in its Five Year State Plan. You will need to submit an application using a web-based system called DD Suite, which can be accessed at <https://www.ddsuite.org/> Additional information on each initiative can be found on DD Suite.

All applications are due by 11:59 pm on February 6, 2018. This notice was posted on DD Suite on December 21, 2017.

**18ED1 - SCHOOL TO PRISON PIPELINE - GCDD** is requesting proposals from individuals or organizations to address the issue of African American males in special education and to ensure these students will have equal access to quality education that can change their trajectory away from the school-to-prison pipeline. Grant amount is \$35,000.

**18ED4 - MARKETING FOR INCLUSIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION - GCDD** is requesting proposals from individuals or organizations to develop an overall strategic marketing plan at this pivotal time in its evolution. The scope of the work will include creative development for a campaign to educate educators, students and families through print, broadcast and digital media channels. Grant amount is \$25,000.

**18REM1 - TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER FOR BEST PRACTICES IN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS - GCDD** is requesting proposals from individuals or organizations to improve employment supports and outcomes for individuals with disabilities who want to work. Grant amount is \$60,000.

## Schedule of NOFA Events

January 16, 2018 Applicants' Conference @ GCDD (10:00 am - 12:00 noon)

January 19, 2018 Deadline for written Questions

January 19, 2018 Deadline for written Requests for Accommodation

January 24, 2018 Answers to written Questions posted on GCDD website

February 6, 2018 Applications Due in DD Suite by 11:59 PM

February 6-9, 2018 Application Review by Grants Manager

February 12-16 2018 Selection Committee conducts first review and selects finalists

February 19-23, 2018 Selection Committee interviews finalists

February 26, 2018 Notice of Intent to Award posted on Website

February 26-March 9, 2018 Contract Negotiations with program staff

March 9 -14, 2018 Complete Contract process (Signatures)

March 15, 2018 Work Begins (or later)

## Five Year Plan Goals

- Education
- Employment
- Formal & Informal Supports
- Real Communities
- Self-Advocacy