

MAKING **a** DIFFERENCE

REAL HOMES. REAL CAREERS. REAL LEARNING. REAL INFLUENCE. REAL SUPPORTS.



**NEWS
FOR YOU:**

DISABILITY IN THE MEDIA: Changing for the Better?

Get Ready for the **2017 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

2ND TAKE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO WORK DAY Kicks Off



On the Cover:

Senator John Albers (R-District 56) visited freshman Jacob Moore (right) at Milton High School during GCDD's second annual Take Your Legislator to Work Days. (See story on page 18.)

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



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

Valerie Meadows Suber
Editor-in-Chief &
Public Information Director
valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov

2 Peachtree Street NW
Suite 26-246
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
Voice 404.657.2126
Fax 404.657.2132
Toll Free 1.888.275.4233
TDD 404.657.2133
www.gcdd.org

O'Neill Communications

Devika Rao
devika@oneillcommunications.com

Nancy O'Neill
Design & Layout

On the Back Cover:

Register for GCDD 2017 Advocacy Days and make your voice heard. Receive advocacy training then meet Georgia legislators at the State Capitol. (See story on page 15.)

MAKING a DIFFERENCE

A quarterly magazine of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities VOLUME 17, ISSUE 3

Disability in the Media – Changing for the Better? ..page 6

There is no denying that the representation of people with disabilities in the media has risen in recent times. But what does this increased representation of people with disabilities in the media signify?

Get Ready for the 2017 Legislative Session page 11

GCDD's legislative priorities focus on the five goals of the new strategic plan including employment, education, real communities, formal/informal supports and self-advocacy.

Georgia Evolution Conference Reimagines Opportunities for People with Disabilities page 16

This inaugural conference concentrated on giving providers the tools they need to advance employment support for all people with disabilities in careers and in the community.

GCDD Kicks off Second Take Your Legislator to Work Day (TYLTWD) page 18

TYLTWD aims to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and the belief that employment should be the expected and preferred outcome of all publicly funded services.

FEATURES DEPARTMENTS

GCDD Viewpoint

Happy New Year!..... 3

In The News

Money Follows the Person
Hosts Photovoice Exhibit
Capturing Community Living 4

Around GCDD

2017 Georgia Winter Institute
Kicks off Jan. 22, GCDD
Welcomes Six New Advisory
Members 5

Feature

Advocating to the Fullest 9

Perspectives

Critical Need for Inclusion
in the Arts
by Douglas Scott 22

Myriad Acts of Change
by Jaehn Clare, MA 23

Real Communities

Real Communities Collaborates
to Impact Change 24

Expert Update

Discovery: Focusing on
Strengths, Gifts, Talents and
Skills for Inclusive Work
by Doug Crandell 26

Mia's Space

The Rhythms and Patterns
of Life 27

Straight Talk

Building Communities with
Roving Listeners
by Lucas Rice 28

Calendar 29

In Memoriam

A Tribute to Dottie Adams:
A Life's Work Well Done 30



Happy New Year!

From the GCDD family to yours, we wish you a very happy new year! We hope that 2017 will be a great year for all of us in the disability community. This year could be the time when Georgia finally takes its place as a leader in meeting the needs of individuals and families.

I know what you are thinking. We already have had enough change and still things have not gotten better. It seems like every year we are bombarded with changes in waivers, staff and direction. Will the services we currently have be here next year or will we have to search for what we need?

This edition will examine several of those changes coming. The legislative session has just begun. With the help of a revitalized UNLOCK! Coalition and Employment First Coalition we hope to engage each of you in trying to make legislative change. This year, we will not be holding Disability Day at the Capitol and have replaced it with six Advocacy Days. We encourage you to attend one of these days. This is an opportunity to meet with your elected officials to talk about issues like the waiting list, Employment First, post-secondary education, housing, transportation and other issues.

In this edition, we will provide you with information to talk about how we believe the State can address the waiting list, ensure that employment becomes a first option especially for children leaving high school and the need of students enrolled in inclusive post-secondary education programs to access the HOPE scholarship. We also hope to see legislation that will end the use of nursing facilities and private institutions to house children under the age of 22.

The federal election has the potential to bring much change. While we do not know what will be proposed at this time, Georgia's own Rep. Tom Price (R) has been selected as the new Secretary of Health and Human Services. At the time of this writing, the position is pending confirmation by the US Senate. This Department, along with the Department of Justice has been responsible for much of the change in the current system of services and supports for individuals with disabilities. Whether these changes will stay or be replaced is unclear, but we will monitor what happens and keep you informed.

Remember that GCDD is here to assist you. Check out our website and join our advocacy network so that you can stay informed. We hope you enjoy reading this magazine and we want to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts and comments about the magazine by writing to our editor, Valerie Meadows Suber at valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov

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

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.

GCDD VIEWPOINT

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.

Contact Our Editor and Public Information Director:

Valerie Meadows Suber
valerie.suber@gcdd.ga.gov
P: 404.657.2122
F: 404.657.2132

or: 2 Peachtree Street, NW
Suite 26-246
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142

Audio Version:

You can now listen to an audio version of *Making a Difference* on the website at www.gcdd.org.

Large Print Version:

A large font version is available for download at www.gcdd.org.

Subscriptions / Back Issues:

Visit us at our website: www.gcdd.org or call us: 404.657.2126.

It is our policy to publish readers' comments. Contents do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GCDD, the editors or state government.

Magazine Sponsorship:

For sponsorship opportunities contact: Devika Rao at 678.384.7836 or devika@oneillcommunications.com

Money Follows the Person Hosts Photovoice Exhibit Capturing Community Living

On November 16, the Georgia Money Follows the Person (MFP) program presented *Gaining Freedom, Coming Home*, a photovoice exhibit, at Georgia State University's (GSU) Centennial Hall in Downtown Atlanta. The participants presented their photovoice projects on their transition into community-based settings.



Pictured at the exhibit (l to r): Yaser Abdallah (Participant), Chandrika Derricho (GHPC MFP Evaluation Team), Brittnee Hawkins (GHPC MFP Evaluation Team), Michelle Rushing (GHPC MFP Evaluation Team), Tammy Williams (Participant), Danny Holland (Participant), Kristi Fuller (GHPC MFP Evaluation Team) and Patricia Nichol (Participant).

“Participants who transitioned from institutional care to HCBS reported quality of life improvements regarding their living situation, choice and control and overall satisfaction.”

To see an infographic about the Money Follows the Person program, visit http://gcdd.org/images/MAD_Magazine/MADWinter2017/MFP_Infographic_FINALx.pdf

Since 2008, Georgia has successfully transitioned over 2,200 participants from institutional settings to home and community-based services (HCBS) through the federally funded Money Follows the Person (MFP) rebalancing demonstration program.

On November 16, the Georgia MFP presented *Gaining Freedom, Coming Home*, a photovoice exhibit, at Georgia State University's (GSU) Centennial Hall in Downtown Atlanta.

“Through this program, we have been able to collect a lot of quantitative data, but we wanted to find a way to show people's lives after moving into the community,” said Kristi Fuller, an evaluator for MFP at the Georgia Health Policy Center (GHPC) at GSU. GHPC has been the evaluator for MFP in the State since 2009.

Using photovoice, a participatory action research method, MFP participants documented their own transition experience. Photovoice encouraged participants to record, reflect and share their experiences through photography. Themes from participants' photographs and narratives identified programmatic successes as well as opportunities for continued support of long-term care services provided in home and community-based settings.

Thirty photographs that document the transition of five individuals moving from long-

term care facilities back into the community were displayed as part of the exhibition.

The exhibit showcased the journeys of five people – Yaser, Danny, Patricia, Michelle and Tammy – as they left long-term care facilities and returned to the community as part of the MFP program. At the event, they shared their stories with advocates, policymakers, agency leaders, family and friends.

The program has allowed qualified beneficiaries to get the care they need, while improving their quality of life. In sharing these stories, the event hoped to bring attention to two aspects of MFP.

“The cornerstone of this grant is to rebalance Medicaid when it comes to long-term services and supports through moving people from institutional care to community-based settings,” added Fuller. “It is generally less expensive to have people live in community-based settings and provides a better quality of life.”

Second, the participants hoped that the policymakers and other influencers could understand the life and perspective of the individual living in the community.

Participants who transitioned from institutional care to HCBS reported quality of life improvements regarding their living situation, choice and control and overall satisfaction.

Through its efforts, Georgia has been a leader in the MFP program based on the low number of individuals who have had to return to institutional care.

MFP is a national Medicaid program sponsored by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The program, awarded to the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH), helps people who are living in institutions, such as psychiatric residential treatment facilities, nursing homes or other long-term care facilities, return to their homes and communities while continuing to receive supportive services. By the end of the grant in 2020, DCH seeks to transition 2,754 individuals.

For more information on Money Follows the Person, visit <https://dch.georgia.gov/georgia-money-follows-person-ga-mfp>

IN THE NEWS



2017 Georgia Winter Institute Kicks off Jan. 22

The 2017 Georgia Winter Institute (GWI) will be held from Jan. 22 – 25 in Columbus, GA. The annual conference, presented by the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University, brings together people from all walks of life to learn more about building communities that include and engage all citizens.

GWI strives to build more inclusive communities through futures planning and listening. In attendance are people with disabilities, their families and supporters; representatives of state agencies, services providers, advocacy groups, faith communities, business leaders and civic organizations.



Participants learn best practices in leadership, how to work with key stakeholders to build and sustain inclusive communities, and ways to support lives well lived for people who have too often been marginalized.

The event is sponsored by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities, The Arc Georgia and Inclusion Press.

To learn more and register for 2017 GWI, visit: www.georgiawinterinstitute.com

GCDD Welcomes Six New Advisory Members

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities welcomes six new advisory Council members to its board. The advisory members are selected by Council members, have no voting rights, and each serve one two-year term.

Ms. June Armour, Self Advocate
Athens, Georgia 30601
706.548.9553

Ms. Christine Clark, Parent Advocate
Woodstock, Georgia 30189
678.772.4690
chrisclark930213@aol.com

Ms. Viviana Fernandez, Parent Advocate
Johns Creek, Georgia 30097
770.310.8077
vivianafernandez2002@yahoo.com

Mr. Ernest Hopkins III, Self-Advocate
Atlanta, Georgia 30311
770.292.8788
ernesthopkins2004@yahoo.com

Mr. Stephen McGarity, Self Advocate
Carnesville, Georgia 30521
706.207.6181
svmcgari@uga.edu

Ms. Jennifer Stratton, Sibling Advocate
Brunswick, Georgia 31520
912.230.4662
jsstratton@gmail.com



Sen. Lindsey Tippins (R – District 37) speaks with Karla Wade of Kennesaw State University's Inclusive post-secondary education program during the 2016 Advocacy Days.

Register NOW for GCDD 2017 Advocacy Days!

Learn how to speak to your legislators. Then visit the Capitol to educate them about the issues you care about. Each day has a specific topic; we welcome you to register for as many days as you would like!

MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD!

2017 Advocacy Days will be held on:

- **February 1**
- **February 7**
- **February 23**
- **February 28**
- **March 9**

Register online at
<http://bit.ly/2fRxoYX>

It is important that these shows are understood as public **CONVERSATION STARTERS**, and we pay attention to the **VERY FACT** that **DISABILITY** is in there.



Actor Daryl “Chill” Mitchell (right) is one of a small minority of people with disabilities actually portraying a person with a disability on the TV show *NCIS: New Orleans*.

1.7%

PERCENTAGE OF CHARACTERS WITH DISABILITIES OF ALL SERIES REGULARS ON NETWORK SHOWS FOR THE 2016-2017 SEASON

Source: GLAAD Annual Report 2016

Disability in the Media – Changing for the Better?

By Ruksana Hussain

There is no denying that the representation of people with disabilities in the media has risen in recent times. Especially in visual media where shows like HBO’s *Game of Thrones* and ABC’s *Speechless* have cast actors with disabilities in roles that may or may not be related to their particular type of disability.

And the onslaught of reality TV has its own loyal audience – A&E’s *Born This Way* has been renewed for a third season. In recent news, a 15-month-old Georgia boy with Down syndrome was to be featured in holiday campaigns by children’s clothing company OshKosh B’Gosh.

Media advocacy organization GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) released its annual report assessing representation of minority groups on television, including people with disabilities, with findings showing that characters with disabilities account for 1.7% of all series regulars on network shows for the 2016-2017 season, the highest percentage recorded since GLAAD started tracking disability representation on TV in 2010.

But what does this increased representation of people with disabilities in the media signify? Is the media moving in the right direction in terms of portraying characters with disabilities accurately? How are we as a society engaging with its media products?

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, co-director, Emory Disability Studies Initiative, provides some insight on the matter. “It is important that these shows are understood as public conversation starters, and we pay attention to the very fact that disability is in there. It is a political and cultural issue. People with disabilities have traditionally been represented in the media in stereotypical and often discriminatory ways. There

are several expected cultural scripts that get mobilized when media makes stories about disability. So we need to see what is the cultural work of these stories.”

One disability story that’s embedded everywhere and is inherited is the sentimental or “inspirational” story, which we see repeatedly, as with any kind of stereotypical narrative received in culture. The concern is whether such media products reinforce the kinds of stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes that people with disabilities experience, in an era of understanding disability as a social and cultural identity. For a group that has historically been excluded, disadvantaged and often been discriminated against, this is a completely new understanding of what it means to be identified as a person with disability.

“Is the media moving in the right direction in terms of portraying characters with disabilities accurately?”

Case in point being the book by Jojo Moyes adapted to a feature film, *Me Before You*, where disability was a central theme of the storyline. While the movie begins as a formulaic romance, it ends with the quadriplegic male character opting for euthanasia (chemical killing or physician

assisted suicide). There is a great deal of activism in the disability community around issues of quality of life for people with disabilities and the logic of people with disabilities using euthanasia. There were huge protests on social media and at movie theaters internationally surrounding the movie.

A professor of English at Emory University, where her fields of study are disability studies, American literature and culture, feminist theory and bioethics, Garland-Thomson addresses the different conversations that such media representation of people with disabilities enables. “There are useful conversations in the disability advocacy, activism and rights communities. There is public conversation through op-eds and blogs, such as the Disability Visibility project by Alice Wong. There is also conversation about employing actors without disabilities to play characters with disabilities. There is a long history of this.”

“One disability story that’s embedded everywhere and is inherited is the sentimental or “inspirational” story, which we see repeatedly, as with any kind of stereotypical narrative received in culture.”

But now, in *Speechless*, Micah Fowler, the actor who plays JJ, has cerebral palsy in real life and so does his character. Christopher Joseph “Chris” Burke played Charles “Corky” Thatcher in ABC’s *Life Goes On*, making him portray the first character in a network television series with Down syndrome. Lauren Potter portrayed the recurring character Becky Jackson, a cheerleader with Down syndrome, in all six seasons of the Fox TV show *Glee*.

Kayla Brown, counselor/coordinator of Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) at University of Washington expresses similar sentiments. “*Speechless* spins a different narrative than we are used to seeing for people with disabilities. JJ’s character has cerebral palsy and it

“There is a great deal of activism in the disability community around issues of quality of life for people with disabilities and the logic of people with disabilities using euthanasia.”

prevents him from speaking out loud so he has assisted technology to do that for him. The idea of other people speaking for him and on his behalf was worrisome, but the show demonstrates that assisted technology is empowering and though JJ has other people speak out loud for him, he certainly does not accept misrepresentation of that.”

Brown works with high school and college students at DO-IT and disability in the media is part of her focus as she tries to integrate a more social justice lens for people she works with. “One of my tests in looking at media and looking at characters specifically, is that I look to see if I took away their disability or anything related to their disability to the storyline or in their characteristics, what would be left. I look for relationships, hobbies, interests and when we look at JJ, it is apparent he is much like a typical teenager.”

One of the most prominent actors with disabilities to have made a mark in cinema worldwide is Peter Dinklage, who plays the role of Lord Tyrion Lannister in *Game of Thrones*. In fact, *The New York Times* Op-Ed columnist Maureen Dowd calls him the first dwarf heartthrob in her article in the *Sunday Review* dated April 2016. “In my view, he has been appropriately glamorized like any other celebrity or actor,” says Garland-Thomson, whose work develops the field of critical disability studies in the health humanities to bring forward disability access, inclusion and identity to communities inside and outside of the academy. “That is a benefit, a kind of inclusion. The plot knits in his disability, but it is not the only element of his character. A lot of people probably love the show and his character, watching without any idea

TV SERIES REGULARS WITH DISABILITIES



ON THE RISE: Among series regulars appearing this season on scripted prime-time programs on ABC, CBS, The CW, Fox and NBC, 15 are expected to have disabilities.

By contrast, there were just eight portrayals of disability on network shows last season.

Source: GLAAD Annual Report 2016

“WHAT WE ARE SEEING is more

characters written in a

WAY THAT’S APPROPRIATE

and not objectified as an inspiration for others,

which, **90%**

OF THE TIME,

that’s what they are there for.





that the fact that he is there is significant in terms of the politics of social justice.”

According to Garland-Thomson, who is also the author of *Staring: How We Look* and several other books, the inclusion of people with disabilities, even if the plot is filled with expected stereotypes and discriminatory narrative, is a good thing because it keeps the conversation about disability going. “There are very few media products that do unequivocal positive political social work, in part because of the very nature of media products. Ads that have people with disabilities in them are great, but that is where disability is an incidental aspect. It can be included as one of the characters, but it is harder to do that in narrative.”

The FX horror anthology television series *American Horror Story: Freak Show* cast Mat Fraser as a person with a disability. Jamie Brewer, an actress with Down syndrome, was also cast in several seasons of the show. Adds Brown, “Every character Brewer played was integrated like a normal character. It felt so natural, and that was a shining moment. What we are seeing is more characters written in a way that’s appropriate and not objectified as an inspiration for others, which, 90% of the time, that’s what they are there for.”

But reality television can be deceiving because a lot of it is scripted and has the power to harm or benefit communities. “Rather than telling a narrative of a person with a disability through a depiction or having it acted out by somebody without a disability, these characters are in relationships, working and having businesses so in a lot of ways, it might be a good first step as long as we are always being critical with it because a lot of times it is not through an intersectional lens which is the main problem with media,” says Brown.

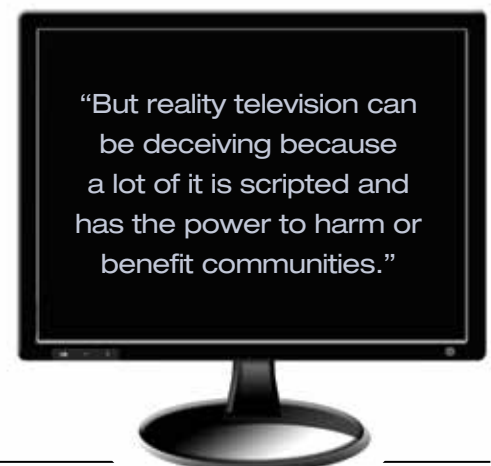
“Sundance TV’s show *Push Girls* starred women in wheelchairs overcoming disabilities. The narrative was people with disabilities could be beautiful too. But what message does that send when you are promoting mainstream beauty standards not representative of community? On one hand, seeing these women being comfortable with their sexuality is great, but instead of

“So where is this conversation headed? Where I try to head it, and a lot of people do, is not to make a judgment about a particular show or narrative as terrible and boycott it, or great because of unequivocal political and social work.”

having a separate show, integrating them into mainstream type media would be better.”

So where is this conversation headed? “Where I try to head it, and a lot of people do, is not to make a judgment about a particular show or narrative as terrible and boycott it, or great because of unequivocal political and social work. It is best to continue having conversation about disability, as long as it is a theme and people with disabilities are in these various media narratives. If there is too much policing, it is not very productive because every cultural representation does certain kinds of work. We can’t always have control over what work it does, and we can’t predict what the reception will be.”

Brown, the author of a multi-part series on disability representation and the media, says, “It is important to be careful and critical of the trend because there is a very fine line. The ‘inspiration’ storyline is not a true representation, and we need endings of plotlines besides the ‘they get cured’ or ‘they die’ scenarios. Visual media is symbolic and influential, and we need that in all forms of media because it is crucial to how we perceive people and groups.”



It is **BEST TO CONTINUE** having conversation about disability, as long as it is a theme and **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES** are in these various media narratives.

RESOURCES

<http://www.foxnews.com/health/2016/11/01/georgia-boy-with-down-syndrome-to-be-featured-in-oshkosh-holiday-ads.html>

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/dis-course-disability-representation-and-media-part-one>

<https://www.disabilitycoop.com/2016/11/07/disability-portrayals-tv-record/22991/>

Advocating to the Fullest

By Devika Rao

Georgians with disabilities want to live full lives in our communities and they are fully capable of doing so. And we know that if we, the citizens of Georgia, choose to make positive changes to our system, more and more people with disabilities will be working in our communities, living with their families or friends or independently as they so choose, and participating in their communities all across Georgia.

When all of our citizens, including those with disabilities, are able to use their gifts and talents and pursue their dreams, it creates a better Georgia for us all. To make this a reality, we all have to become advocates to promote public policy that is truly inclusive of citizens with disabilities.

As the new legislative session has kicked off and the nation will be inaugurating a new administration at the federal level, it is important to remember that advocating just doesn't stop at the polls.

To continue advocating, it is important to keep paying attention to the legislation that is being voted on, new rules and regulations coming from the state and federal level and how they can affect you and how you can make sure you can have your voices heard throughout the entire process.

Know Your Legislators

In the November election, the nation voted for a new president, US senators and representatives, and state senators and representatives. It is important to learn who your state and US senators and representatives are and how they will support issues that are important to you.

To find out who your state senators and representative are, visit: <https://openstates.org>

Connect with Your Legislators

To be an effective advocate for change, building key and strong relationships with your senators and representatives is important. Advocates should connect with legislators year-round, but during the session, it is also key to keep the connection.

During the session, contact your legislator with the method they prefer best. Some legislators love emails while others disregard them. As a general rule, the best way to contact your legislator is as follows in descending order of impact: personal visit to the Capitol; email; letter mailed or faxed to their office; and finally, phone call to their office.

If you are coming to meet your legislator, the best time to find them is generally between 10 AM and noon in the chamber on the third floor of the Capitol, although they convene at different times on some days. Check with the House Clerk's Office and the Secretary of the Senate's Office to determine

To make this

A REALITY, we all have to **BECOME ADVOCATES** to promote public policy that is **TRULY INCLUSIVE** of citizens with disabilities.

Advocates gather at Liberty Park for the 2016 Disability Day at the Capitol in Downtown Atlanta.





REGISTER TODAY!

2017 ADVOCACY DAYS

MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD!

Meet GA Legislators at the State Capitol

- February 1: DD Waivers Day 1 & Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Day
- February 7: DD Waivers Day 2
- February 23: Employment Day
- February 28: Enable Work & Families Day
- March 9: Home & Community Day

For more info or to register, visit: <http://gcdd.org/public-policy/2017-advocacy-days.html>

State legislators including Senator Butch Miller met with advocates in the Capitol during 2016 Advocacy Days.



Eren Niederhoffer talks to Clare Dees during advocacy training before heading to the Capitol.



Public Policy Director Dawn Alford addresses the attendees at GCDD's 2016 Advocacy Days.

what time they go into session on the day you plan to visit.

To find contact information for your legislators and copies of legislation, join GCDD's Advocacy Network at http://www.ciclt.net/sn/gre2/gre2_join.aspx?ClientCode=gcdd

Join GCDD's Advocacy Network



Advocate with GCDD

This year, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) and its public policy staff will be at the Gold Dome again to advocate for waivers, Employment First, education and more during Advocacy Days.

We encourage you to sign up and come advocate with us. Check page 15 for more information and how to register for Advocacy Days.

 **OPEN STATES**

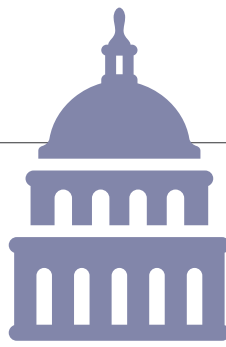
Find your State Senators and Representatives at openstates.org

GCDD also encourages you to get involved by joining our Advocacy Network through our website. Through the network, you can learn about bills of interest and your elected officials or sign up for alerts and publications. To be an effective advocate, you have to be well informed. By joining the Advocacy Network, you will be able to:

- **Track Legislation:** Review the bills GCDD is tracking at the State Capitol. The legislation is organized by category and topic to make it easy to find the bills you are looking for.
- **Interact with Elected Officials:** Based on your home address we link you to your state and federal elected officials. Do you know a legislator? Did you speak with a legislator? Let us know by recording your interactions with elected officials and your key relationships.
- **Receive Publications and Alerts:** Choose to receive our Advocacy & Policy Alerts, which include Calls to Action, *Public Policy for the People* legislative eNewsletter and Updates; Community News; UNLOCK! Alerts and/or GCDD's quarterly *Making a Difference* magazine.

Get Ready for the 2017 Legislative Session

By Dawn Alford, GCDD Public Policy Director



Rep. Darrel Ealum joined self-advocates in Albany for the 2017 UNLOCK! Rev-Up to learn about the issues facing Georgia residents with disabilities.

The phrase, “What a difference a year makes,” certainly rings true today. Since the conclusion of the 2016 Georgia legislative session, there have been so many changes in leadership on the federal, state and local levels.

A presidential election was held, new legislators were elected bringing a few new faces to the legislative arena, and there have been changes in leadership within departments that support people with disabilities. For example, in the fall, Governor Deal appointed new leadership at the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald; Commissioner Frank Berry at the Department of Community Health (DCH); and Executive Director Sean Casey at the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). In addition, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) added some new faces to its team as well.

We hope you will come join us for our 2017 Advocacy Days where you can meet many of these new faces and support our mission to improve the lives of people with disabilities and their families in Georgia.

To carry out our mission, GCDD remains committed to working hard on a daily basis at the Gold Dome during the legislative session alongside policymakers and other allies to support our mission 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. Keep reading to find out more about our legislative priorities and some things we have been doing to gear up for this year’s session.

Leading up to the 2017 Georgia General Assembly

Over the past year, GCDD focused on developing its new strategic plan for FFY 2017 through FFY 2021. After receiving input from the public and being vetted by our Council, the five big areas of focus for the new strategic plan include employment, education, real communities, formal/informal supports and self-advocacy. You will notice that our 2017 legislative priorities focus heavily around these areas.

“A presidential election was held, new legislators were elected bringing a few new faces to the legislative arena, and there have been changes in leadership within departments that support people with disabilities.”

In fact, during the fall, we were engaged in many activities to support our strategic plan. One such activity supporting our employment focus was our second annual Take Your Legislator to Work Day (TYLTWD), in which employees with disabilities signed up with GCDD and then invited their legislators to visit them at their place of employment to highlight the wonderful work they do and the benefits of employing people with disabilities in the



A Look at GCDD’s 2017 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



- Employment First
- Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs
- NOW/COMP DD Waivers
- Children’s Freedom Initiative
- The Family Care Act
- Intellectual Disabilities in Capital Punishment
- Elder and Disabled Abuser Registry
- Enable Work
- Service Providers Association for Developmental Disabilities Housing Study
- UNLOCK! Coalition

GET INVOLVED!



Mark Your Calendar and Register to Attend 2017 Advocacy Days at the Capitol

No matter how robust our legislative agenda, we cannot be successful in our efforts without YOU – the voices of the people with disabilities, their families and other allies. So don't forget to register TODAY by going to <http://bit.ly/2fRxoYX>. You don't want to miss it!

- **FEBRUARY 1:** DD Waivers Day 1 & Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) Day
- **FEBRUARY 7:** DD Waivers Day 2
- **FEBRUARY 23:** Employment Day
- **FEBRUARY 28:** Enable Work and Families Day (Family Care Act, PeachWork, Phillip Payne Personal Assistance Program)
- **MARCH 9:** Home & Community Day (Elder & Disabled Abuser Registry, Offensive Language, Transportation, Residential Housing Study Committee)



Join Our Weekly Advocacy Calls on Mondays (Open to Everyone)

The calls start on the first Monday of the legislative session, January 9, 2017. Calls made every Monday at 9:30 AM that is a legislative day until the session is over. Call 1.888.355.1249 and enter pass code 232357



Read Our Legislative Newsletter *Public Policy for the People* and Receive the Latest Information Alerts throughout the Session

Please go to www.gcdd.org, scroll to the bottom of our homepage and click on "Join our Advocacy Team!" and follow the instructions. You will have the opportunity to select your subscription preferences. Be sure that you sign up to receive our "Advocacy & Policy Alerts" and "UNLOCK! Alerts." This will also allow you to receive our legislative newsletter, "Public Policy for the People" that comes out every two weeks during session and calls-to-action regarding important actions we need you to take!

meetings since the end of the 2016 legislative session. In spring 2016, an UNLOCK! Post Legislative Summit was held to celebrate the successes from the 2016 legislative session. Then, in the fall, an UNLOCK! Pre-Legislative Summit was held where legislative issues were presented and the UNLOCK! Coalition voted on what issues should be supported by the Coalition during the 2017 legislative session. Finally, in December an UNLOCK! Rev-Up pep rally was held to get people excited and ready to advocate and tell their stories for the upcoming advocacy season. You will read more about the UNLOCK! agenda items later in this article.

2017 Legislative Priorities - Led by GCDD

Support Employment First

Employment First means that employment should be the first and preferred option for all people, regardless of their disability. Under Employment First legislation, employment in the general workforce at or above minimum wage is the first and preferred option for all working-age citizens with disabilities. Currently, the Georgia system creates many barriers for individuals with disabilities to work. Although the majority of Georgians with developmental disabilities want to work, only 10% of Georgians with developmental disabilities are currently employed in the community.¹ Under an Employment First policy, state agencies will need to re-align their policies and funding to prioritize employment for all working-age Georgians with disabilities.

- **Support legislation that addresses employment barriers for people with disabilities, makes Georgia an Employment First state, and prioritizes competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities**

Support Students to Attend Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs in GA

Inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) provides opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to access higher education. This prepares them to live increasingly independent lives and pursue careers of their choice.



Corbett Dishman took part in TYLTWD by inviting his legislator to visit him at his job at Partners II Pizza in December.

workforce, as well as educate them on policies that can promote competitive, integrated employment for people with disabilities. You can read more about TYLTWD in another article within this issue. Supporting competitive, integrated employment and improving employment outcomes for Georgians with disabilities is a huge priority for GCDD, one that we will be tackling during the upcoming session and in the years to come. (Read about TYLTWD on page 18.)

Not only were we engaging with our legislators on TYLTWD, but the UNLOCK! Coalition, formerly known as "Unlock the Waiting Lists!" continued to grow its membership and has held three major

Individuals with intellectual disabilities who receive post-secondary education are more likely to find paid employment than those who don't, and their earnings are 73% higher than peers who do not receive post-secondary education.²

Thanks to legislative support, the number of IPSE programs in Georgia has grown from one to five, with two more coming in 2017. However, students in these programs have very few resources available to pay for them compared to what is available to students of traditional college programs. For example, IPSE students cannot access the HOPE scholarship program. Without financial support many qualified, eager students cannot afford the life-changing opportunity of inclusive post-secondary education.

- **Support the sustainability of inclusive post-secondary educational programs in Georgia and increase student access to these programs. Increase legislative funding from \$200,000 to \$500,000 in total, \$100,000 of which can be student scholarships. The FY 2018 ASK for new funding: \$300,000**

“As of 9/30/16, there are 8,698 individuals with developmental disabilities on this waiting list [New Options Waiver and Comprehensive Supports Waiver].”

We Need More DD Waivers

Out of the several Medicaid waivers that Georgia offers to those who qualify for this level of care, the New Options Waiver (NOW) and the Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program (COMP) has by far Georgia's longest waiting list. As of 9/30/16, there are 8,698 individuals with developmental disabilities on this waiting list. These individuals and their families are desperately hanging on and need Georgia to throw them a lifeline.

- **Fund at least 2470 NOW (80%)/COMP (20%) waivers to reduce Georgia's longest waiting list and allow more individuals to begin to receive services. \$33,058,273**

“The Family Care Act would enable Georgians who have earned sick leave to use up to five days of that leave to care for sick members of their immediate family.”

Children's Freedom Initiative (CFI): Bring Georgia's Children Home

There are a number of school-age children living in nursing facilities or intermediate care facilities in Georgia. These children did nothing wrong. They are in facilities simply because they have a disability and need care despite the fact that it is completely possible to care for them in the community. Georgia needs to shut the front door to these facilities and ensure every child has a permanent loving home.

- **Support the CFI effort to ensure all children have a permanent loving home. Support legislation to prevent young Georgians under the age of 22 from being placed in intermediate care or nursing facilities. Provide funding for all of the young Georgians with disabilities under the age of 22 who are currently living in facilities to move into permanent loving homes and have the care they need.**

Supported by GCDD but led by other entities

Support Georgians Who Care for Their Families: The Family Care Act

Many Georgians balance their work lives with caring for their families. The Family Care Act would enable Georgians who have earned sick leave to use up to five days of that leave to care for sick members of their immediate family. The Family Care Act does NOT add any additional sick days or require employers to provide them; it only allows Georgians to use the sick days they've already earned to care for family members.

- **Support the Family Care Act.**



Students from Kennesaw State University's Academy of Inclusive Learning and Social Growth attended Disability Day to support more IPSEs.

Current Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) Programs in Georgia

1. Kennesaw State University
2. East GA State College
3. Columbus State University
4. Georgia Institute of Technology
5. Albany Technical College

Coming Spring 2017

- Georgia State University
- University of Georgia



REFERENCES:

1. National Core Indicators 2014-2015. National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and Human Services Research Institute. <http://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/charts/>
2. Migliore, A., Butterworth, J., & Hart, D. (2009). Postsecondary Education and Employment Outcomes for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities. Think College Fast Facts. No 1. <http://www.thinkcollege.net/publications/fast-facts>
3. See Atkins v. Virginia, 536 U.S. 304 (2002) (see page 14)



UNLOCK! advocates held a Pre-Legislative Summit back in October to vote on the 2017 UNLOCK! Legislative Agenda.

Change the Standard to Prove Intellectual Disabilities in Capital Punishment Cases

In 2002, the US Supreme Court said it is wrong to execute a person with intellectual disabilities because it violates the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.³ But right now in Georgia, it is extremely difficult for an individual to prove in court that they have intellectual disabilities. Georgia is the only one of the fifty states that requires a person to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" that they have intellectual disabilities in capital punishment cases.

- Change the legal standard of proof for proving intellectual disabilities in O.C.G.A. to "preponderance of the evidence," which is the standard used in most other states.

Support the Elder and Disabled Abuser Registry

Georgia needs an Elder and Disabled Abuser Registry comparable to the Child Abuse Registry established in 2016 in Georgia. This would allow employers of direct care workers to have a better way to screen potential employees and may deter abusers.

Support Enable Work

- The creation of the Phillip Payne Personal Assistance Program, a sliding fee scale program for workers with disabilities to pay a cost share that would allow them to access Personal Assistant Services to maintain their independence.
- The creation of PeachWork, a program whose purpose is to provide people with disabilities who are working the opportunity to earn as much as they can and accumulate savings while maintaining needed health coverage.

Service Providers Association for Developmental Disabilities (SPADD) Housing Study Committee

Supplemental Security income is the only resource available to many individuals with developmental disabilities to pay for housing. A legislative study of residential care costs and exploration of funding to support intellectual and other developmental disability organizations to bridge the gap between an individual's Social Security income and the cost of housing is necessary.

Receive the latest information throughout the session:

Get Involved!



Join Our Advocacy Team

Please go to www.gcdd.org, scroll to the bottom of our homepage and click on "Join our Advocacy Team!" and follow the instructions. You will have the opportunity to select your subscription preferences. Be sure that you sign up to receive our "Advocacy & Policy Alerts" and "UNLOCK! Alerts." This will also allow you receive our legislative newsletter, "Public Policy for the People" that comes out every two weeks during session and calls-to-action regarding important actions we need you to take!

UNLOCK! Coalition (formerly "Unlock the Waiting Lists")



UNLOCK! advocates with Georgians with disabilities so they and their families can live full lives and contribute to Georgia communities and the Georgia economy. We believe Georgia must rebalance its system of long-term services and supports, so that fewer dollars are spent on institutional care and more dollars are invested into home and community-based services (HCBS). Here are a list of issues that UNLOCK! supports for the 2017 session. All issues are led by an organization but supported by UNLOCK! as voted on by its Coalition members:

- **DD Waivers** – address longest waiting list in Georgia (GCDD)
- **Employment** – reduce barriers, improve outcomes, support Employment First (GCDD)
- **Offensive language** – eliminate offensive language in Georgia code (The Arc Georgia)
- **Elderly and Disabled Abuser Registry** – create comprehensive registry (Georgia Council on Aging)
- **Residential Housing Study Committee** – explore costs for folks in residential services (SPADD)
- **Transportation** – advocate for accessible transportation for people with disabilities (American Wheelchair Society)



2017 ADVOCACY DAYS

Registration is now open for the 2017 Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Advocacy Days!

Learn how to speak to your legislators. Then visit the Capitol to educate them about the issues you care about. Each day has a specific topic; we welcome you to register for as many days as you would like!

Let's show Georgia legislators that we have a voice – a voice that must be heard! We will not be put to the side and ignored. We Georgians care about our community and know that these topics are of vital importance to the health of our great State. As a community we have achieved much in the past fifty years. Now as a community we need to keep up the good fight and make Georgia a place where all of us, regardless of our ability, can live, learn, work, play and worship in our community.

So come out, bring a friend or two, and let your voice be heard! Register today to reserve your spot. Space is limited, so don't delay! Please be sure to register your support staff if needed so we will have an accurate head count.

Register online at <http://bit.ly/2fRxoYX>

MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD!

DATES & TOPICS OF 2017 ADVOCACY DAYS

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

- **FEBRUARY 1:** DD Waivers Day 1 & Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) Day **FEBRUARY 7:** DD Waivers Day 2
- **FEBRUARY 23:** Employment Day
- **FEBRUARY 28:** Enable Work and Families Day (Family Care Act, PeachWork, Phillip Payne Personal Assistance Program)
- **MARCH 9:** Home & Community Day (Elder & Disabled Abuser Registry, Offensive Language, Transportation, Residential Housing Study Committee)

DAILY SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

- 8:30 - 9:00** Arrival and registration
- 9:00 - 9:20** Welcome and understand the Issue
- 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 Capitol in teams to call legislators to the ropes
- 12:30 approx.** Drop off legislative visit form to Dawn, Hanna or Stacey

Meet GA Legislators at the State Capitol

We will have CART (Computer Assisted Real Time) available at all Advocacy Days. We are dedicated to all Advocacy Days being accessible for all, so please let us know if you have any specific needs or accommodations. Please note, sign language interpreters require at least seven business days of notice to arrange.

Questions? Problems Registering?

Contact Hanna at 404.657.2124 or hanna.rosenfeld@gcdd.ga.gov

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS!

To make each advocacy day a success, we are in need of many volunteers. The number of volunteers we will need to help on a given day will depend upon how many people register. If you are interested in helping if needed on the days for which you are registered to attend, please indicate this on the registration form and we will contact you with specifics.



Senator John Wilkinson discusses advocate concerns at the Capitol during the 2016 Advocacy Days.

Please see below additional information about parking and accessibility. Thank you for your interest in Advocacy Days!

- **Parking around the Georgia State Capitol:** <https://gba.georgia.gov/general-public-parking>
- **Map of parking locations:** <http://1.usa.gov/1NnBRvz>
- **Information on Public Transportation:** <https://gba.georgia.gov/transportation>
- **Capitol Hill Accessibility Guide for Visitors with Disabilities:** <http://1.usa.gov/1TNQr1>

We are making many
**CHANGES
IN LAW** driven by
changes in possibility.
**MORE IS
POSSIBLE**
for people than we
used to know.

Georgia Evolution Conference Reimagines Opportunities for People with Disabilities

By Ruksana Hussain

Organized jointly by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), Georgia Association of People Supporting Employment First (GAPSE) and Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), over 375 attendees came together at the conference center at the Wyndham Hotel in Peachtree City, GA for the first ever Georgia Evolution Conference in November 2016.

The day and a half long conference comprised mostly of primary service providers/direct support professionals also catered to individuals with disabilities and their families in keeping with the conference theme: Reimagining Opportunities for Georgians with Disabilities.

In fact, apart from the opening presentations that were attended by all, many of the sessions were also geared toward different attendee categories based on their roles – executive directors and board members, middle managers and supervisors, service providers and direct support staff and individuals with disabilities and their families.

Fifteen additional sessions covered relevant and timely topics such as networking to community partnerships, learning how to provide employment services to maintaining friendships.

The conference aimed at giving providers the tools they need to support all people with disabilities in careers and in the community, including follow-up technical assistance; educating and empowering families and individuals with disabilities and engaging them as active partners in this time of change; and building critical partnerships and collaboration between all players in Georgia's disability community.

“There is a lot that is changing in the world of disability and employment right now and a lot of it is exciting, but with any change people need to learn how to operate under that new change,” says conference planner D’Arcy Robb, special projects coordinator at Vocational Rehabilitation Program, a division of GVRA.

To support this, conference speaker David Hoff, national public policy expert at the Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts at Boston presented a State of the Nation: Disability and Employment Policy session.

Specializing in disability employment policy, Hoff addressed important yet complex issues in the disability arena. At the conference, he discussed the Home and Community-Based Services settings rule; the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act; and the Employment First movement by simplifying those topics and how they pertained to Georgia. Hoff also offered a “user friendly” approach to understanding what the critical pieces of each of these game-changing policies are and what they mean for people with disabilities and the community.

Other presenters included providers who have evolved from traditional service models to integrated, innovative



Sean Casey, executive director of GVRA, Ruby Moore of GAO, and Zephine Smith-Dixon of the Department of Education spoke on the state agency leaders panel at the Georgia Evolution Conference.

CONFERENCE RESOURCES:

All related material from the Georgia Evolution Conference is now available at:

[http://www.cvent.com/
events/the-georgia-evolution-
conference-re-imagining-
opportunity-for-individuals-with-
disabilities/custom-17-6eaeacc
42210434f84fcb122f4e0e36a.aspx](http://www.cvent.com/events/the-georgia-evolution-conference-re-imagining-opportunity-for-individuals-with-disabilities/custom-17-6eaeacc42210434f84fcb122f4e0e36a.aspx)

employment; national subject matter experts on employment for people with disabilities; and individuals and families who have made a transition from facility-based services to integrated employment.

To expand its reach, the team behind the conference kept the registration cost at only \$50 per person – unheard of for a conference of this caliber. “We did that very deliberately because we know that it takes a lot to come to a conference, to travel and take time off work,” says Robb. “That part was intentional, to be affordable and accessible to as many people as possible.”

Robb credits Ed James, director of Capability Development at GVRA, for initiating discussions with DBHDD Assistant Director Frank Kirkland, GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson and GAPSE President Phil Chase, on hosting a conference together. “I had the pleasure of being the main conference organizer, but a lot of people were involved in making it such a great success. This really was a ‘how’ conference ... not an end in and of itself, but a piece on this path that we are all on.”

“It is a well-known fact now in the developmental disabilities community that it is possible for all interested people with disabilities to work and federal laws are in place to promote this.”

It is a well-known fact now in the developmental disabilities community that it is possible for all interested people with disabilities to work and federal laws are in place to promote this. But, many people don't know how to go about it. To assist, the conference focused on giving service providers the tools to support everyone interested in self-employment or working in an integrated job in the community regardless of the significance of their disability. The other important audience that the conference was geared toward was people with disabilities and their family members.

“This really was a ‘how’ conference ... not an end in and of itself, but a piece on this path that we are all on.”

“It is about their lives and the many changes taking place but people can only take advantage of it if they understand what the changes are and the opportunities for them,” shares Robb. “We are making many changes in law driven by changes in possibility. More is possible for people than we used to know. Fifty years ago, it was cutting edge and revolutionary for people with significant disabilities to live in the community instead of an institution, but now we know people don't need to be in day programs or sheltered workshops.”

Speaking to that very sentiment were Joshua Wells and his father John Wells who welcomed attendees to the conference. Joshua has been employed at Red Robin, a restaurant chain, for the past 11 years; and, he recently began working a second job at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Earlier in his life, Joshua attended a facility-based program for people with disabilities. His was a story of successfully making the leap to community employment, clearly demonstrating the opportunities and lifestyle that individuals with disabilities can strive to achieve today.

As for next steps, GVRA, in collaboration with DBHDD, DCH and Workforce Development has applied for Vision Quest under the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP) federal grant. In order to apply, there must be partnership between major state agencies demonstrating commitment toward making the local system more employment friendly. If approved, the grant will pay for national subject matter experts, like the speakers that were presenters at the conference, to work with state agencies in providing further technical assistance and support to all parties involved, in truly reimagining and affecting the employment opportunities available for individuals with disabilities in Georgia.



Doug Crandell leads a supervisor session at the Georgia Evolution Conference in Peachtree City, GA.

There is a lot that is changing in the **WORLD OF DISABILITY and EMPLOYMENT** right now and a lot of it **IS EXCITING,** but with any change people need to **LEARN HOW** to operate under that new change.

Conference attendees get updates about the changes in disability employment.



HOW IMPORTANT

is it for people with disabilities to

HAVE A CHOICE

about their lives – the

SAME WAY

people without disabilities have.



Incoming Representative-Elect Renita Shannon (D-District 84) participated in her first TYLTWD on November 1 with Jaehn Clare, executive director of VSA arts of Georgia, the statewide organization for bringing the arts to people with disabilities, low incomes and others at risk.

TYLTWD VISITS were also made by:

Senator Nan Orrock (D-District 36) visited Scott Bales at the GA Department of Agriculture in Atlanta on December 16.

Representative Chuck Martin (R-District 49) visited Liz Persaud at Georgia Tech's Tools for Life in Atlanta on December 22.

GCDD Kicks off Second Take Your Legislator to Work Day

By Devika Rao

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) kicked off its second annual Take Your Legislator to Work Day (TYLTWD) in October 2016 to commemorate National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). The objective of this campaign is to raise awareness about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and the belief that employment and successful careers should be the expected and preferred outcomes of all publicly funded services for individuals with disabilities, i.e., Employment First.

“We were excited to bring this effort back because it was a great success last year,” said Dawn Alford, GCDD’s public policy director. “It went a long way to forming a legislator’s understanding of how beneficial employment of people with disabilities is as well as building relationships with their constituents.”

While many of the same legislators and employees with disabilities met again this year, new faces to the initiative supported TYLTWD’s goal of asking employees with disabilities to invite their legislators to visit their workplaces. The program demonstrates first-hand the power of community-integrated employment for people with disabilities by showcasing their skills and talents in a work environment.

Take Your Legislator to Work Day

This year, the efforts of TYLTWD also hope to revitalize the Employment First Georgia Coalition, a group of advocates including people with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates who believe that all people with disabilities have the ability to work and that Georgia needs an Employment First policy.

Last year, the Coalition put out a call to Employment First Georgia members and the general public looking for Georgians with disabilities who work in the communities that they love. Then they were encouraged to sign up for TYLTWD.

At the time of publication, TYLTWD has held seven legislative visits around the State.

Many connections between legislators, employees and businesses were formed to drive home the message of Employment First and the need for competitive employment for people with disabilities. Showing decision makers the impact of competitive and meaningful employment was the chance of a lifetime.

Incoming Representative-Elect Renita Shannon (D-District 84) participated in her first TYLTWD with Jaehn Clare, executive director of VSA arts of Georgia in Midtown Atlanta.

“I thought this was a great organized effort to help legislators meet individuals with different kinds of disabilities who are proactive citizens who want to be employed and contribute to the community,” said Clare.

VSA arts of Georgia is the statewide organization for bringing the arts to



We have to
BE PARTNERS
 in order to
**MAKE POSITIVE
 AND EFFECTIVE
 CHANGE.**

Senator John Albers (R-District 56) (back row) on the front steps of Milton High School with CBVI students, the school mascot and freshman Jacob Moore (right) during a TYLTWD visit on October 27.

people with disabilities, people with low incomes and other at risk populations.

“It was a great experience,” said Rep. Shannon. “Jaehn talked to me about what it was like having representation in many different occupations for individuals with disabilities. We also talked about the lack of accommodations needed for folks with a disability and how people probably assume that if you have a disability you will need a lot more accommodations than you actually do. A lot revolved around how important it is to actually have representation, to have that visibility for people. A disability shouldn’t prevent you from fulfilling your passions.”

“We are stakeholders and we want advocates, families and self-advocates to build yearlong relationships with their legislators.”

This one-on-one approach that leaves a deeper understanding of people with disabilities and their contributions to the workforce is exactly what TYLTWD intends to achieve.

“This is a huge goal of TYLTWD,” adds Alford. “We are stakeholders and we want advocates, families and self-advocates to build yearlong relationships with their legislators. It’s a true give and take where there is mutual respect and understanding of each other’s abilities.”

A longtime supporter of GCDD and the disability community, Senator John Albers (R-District 56) spent time at Milton High School in North Atlanta with freshman Jacob Moore. Moore’s mother, Heidi, serves on GCDD.

Jacob is currently enrolled in the school’s Intellectual Disabilities Program, which has two initiatives called Community Based Instruction (CBI) and Community Based Vocational Instructional (CBVI) programs. In CBVI, students participate in job sites on and off campus to gain vocational training that will support them in post-secondary efforts – whether it’s higher education or employment.

At the school, Jacob works in the mail room. It is just one of the many jobs that the CBVI program offers.

“We have jobs that are clerical, some kids work in the cafeteria, and recently, we just opened up a coffee shop where much of this training takes place,” said Cynthia Johnson, instructional lead teacher at Milton High. Additionally, the program has offsite training through the fast-food chain, Zaxby’s.

At TYLTWD, Jacob got a chance to show Albers the importance of this program as they spent time together delivering mail and meeting students and teachers around the school.

As long-time family friends, “Jacob was proud to introduce [Sen. Albers] to fellow students and the administrators. This friendship over the years has helped Sen. Albers understand the



Senator Albers with Moore as he delivers mail at Milton High School as part of the Community Based Vocational Instructional (CBVI) program.



1



2

Photo 1 - Corbett Dishman (left) was visited by Senator Marty Harbin (R-District 16) at Partners II Pizza in Fayetteville, GA on December 2.

Photo 2 - Dishman clears tables with a coworker as part of his job.

needs of the disability community via Jacob's life," said Heidi. "At the same time, it was great to have the senator meet the staff, students and peer mentors who are a part of the program. [Milton High] is doing a lot around integration of students with and without disabilities."

The Big Takeaway

"The impression I was seeking to make on Rep. Shannon when she visited was how important it is for people with disabilities to have a choice about their lives – the same way people without disabilities have," said Clare.

Additionally, added Clare, it was important for her to showcase that the arts can be an area of gainful employment for people with disabilities as well.

And by allowing Sen. Albers to meet with Jacob and other students at Milton High, Heidi hoped to "see more funding for home and community-based waivers. We have been very blessed to have the waiver for years, and I see what a huge

positive impact it has had on Jacob's development and his ability to communicate and socialize," she said.

"Here in Georgia, it is a priority to want everyone to look at employment as the first option for all working-age people with disabilities."

With a waitlist of over 8,000, "This opportunity should be available for every family. We need to find a way to allow those families to have access to these services so individuals can reach their full potential and give back to the community."

Employment First

It has been about ten years since advocates began actively seeking an Employment First policy for the State of Georgia. In 2015, the House of Representatives formed the Employment First and Post-Secondary Education Study Committee to look at these issues.

What does being an Employment First state mean? Upon becoming law, state agencies would have to reprioritize their policies and funding so that employment becomes a priority option for every working-age Georgian with a disability, regardless of the significance of their disability.

.....

Currently, 46 out of 50 states have some efforts focused on Employment First.

Employment First Georgia



The Employment First Georgia Coalition, a group of advocates including people with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates, believes all people with disabilities have the ability to work and that Georgia needs an Employment First policy.



Currently, 46 out of 50 states have some efforts focused on Employment First.

At the same time, other federal legislation and mandates like the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act and the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) settings rule from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services – all passed down federally in 2014 – are setting the tone of integrated and inclusive communities, which includes Employment First practices in a state.

WIOA and the HCBS rule are two really big items on the disability landscape happening right now for people with disabilities. The HCBS rule declared that people with disabilities should receive services in integrated and inclusive communities not only for employment, but also transportation, education, housing and other areas.

Here in Georgia, it is a priority to want everyone to look at employment as the first option for all working-age people with disabilities. All agencies work together but approach it from a different angle. The question behind pushing Employment First is how to get more people with disabilities into the community and how to get them employed just like anybody else.

Advocacy

Like any policy efforts, advocacy remains the strongest way for the community to engage with legislators and other decision makers on what issues matter most.

When it comes to employment, “we are also hoping to revitalize the Employment First Georgia Coalition and would like volunteers and advocates and people who want to support the cause,” said Alford.

During the legislative session, GCDD will be hosting Advocacy Day for Employment First on Feb. 23, 2017 at the Georgia State Capitol in Downtown Atlanta.

“You cannot underestimate the impact of forming a connection with a constituent who represents an issue you are working on,” said Rep. Shannon. “This initiative has heightened my awareness and I will be able to see things from a different perspective on issues about people with disabilities.

“Like any policy efforts, advocacy remains the strongest way for the community to engage with legislators and other decision makers on what issues matter most.”

“But I encourage all advocates, families and the community to stay proactive and contact me or your legislator if there is legislation that impacts the disability community. We have to be partners in order to make positive and affective change.”

Photo 3 - Representative Tom Taylor (R-District 79) (center) visited Evan Nodvin, a GCDD Council member, at the Marcus Jewish Community Center in Dunwoody, GA on November 17.

Photo 4 - Nodvin (left) with Rep. Taylor in the exercise room at the center where he works.

**ADVOCACY DAY FOR
EMPLOYMENT FIRST**
February 23, 2017
Georgia State Capitol
See more info on page 15.



Chad Roberts (left) was visited by Representative Scot Turner (R-District 21) at Sweetwater Growers in Canton.

There is a
CRITICAL LACK

of disability representation
IN THE ARTS –

television, movies, live
performance, etc. This is a
far too common practice
in Hollywood.

PERSPECTIVES



Photo by Bubba Carr

DOUGLAS SCOTT is founder and artistic/executive director of Full Radius Dance, a physically integrated dance company that works with people with and without disabilities.



Photo by Bubba Carr

Dancers communicate an awareness
and acceptance of the body.

Critical Need for Inclusion in the Arts

By Douglas Scott

When I describe Full Radius Dance as a physically integrated company composed of dancers with and without disabilities to a new acquaintance, their response is usually along the lines of, “That must be so rewarding.” After hearing this repeatedly, I began asking myself, “Why? Why this reaction? What’s the intent behind this remark?”

The creation and performance of art is rewarding, but experience has taught me that’s not what they mean by “that must be so rewarding.” The comment, and the way it is delivered, implies it must be fulfilling for me to enrich the life of people with disabilities so I must have an altruistic reason for doing what I do. The bias that lurks behind this is supposition is that people with disabilities can’t be dancers so surely Full Radius Dance’s work must be therapeutic and recreational, not professional artistry.

And once again, I asked myself, “Why?”

There is a critical lack of disability representation in the arts – television, movies, live performance, etc. Ask someone to name a dancer with a disability, and most likely, they’ll name Artie from the Fox TV show *Glee*, who we should note, was an actor without a disability playing a character with a disability. This is a far too common practice in Hollywood. Perhaps they’ll name a current *Dancing with the Stars* (ABC) contestant, as in recent seasons, who is a person with a disability – just like they’ve got to have an Olympic athlete, a former child star and an older actress.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m happy the show introduces non-typical bodies to a large audience. But who else is doing so? No one. It’s difficult to find more than a handful of performers with disabilities in popular media. This lack of representation and

visibility hampers inclusion of artists with disabilities, and also, in the recognition of their professionalism and artistry.

When Nyle DeMarco, a Deaf model, competed in (and won) season 22 of *Dancing with The Stars*, I remember a newspaper headline exclaiming, “He’s Deaf! And He Can Dance!” I think we all see the subtext there. Shouldn’t his disability cancel out his talent? Then, how can Full Radius Dance have dancers in wheelchairs as part of a professional company?

How can we combat these unfounded, unfair preconceptions? How can we change the way society sees bodies? By being out there – dancing, singing, acting and creating. Let’s transform the way people look at disability and show that disability is not equal to “less than.” How about showing disability as just another facet of human diversity?

In that respect, Full Radius Dance believes physically integrated dance is not just about the disabled body, but the bodies of all the dancers, with and without disabilities. We communicate an awareness and acceptance of the body and a deep recognition of its power and potential.

To paraphrase a popular English idiom, “A dance is worth a thousand words.” I can write any number of essays but you experiencing our art will convey much, much more.

Myriad Acts of Change

By Jaehn Clare, MA

In the early 1980s, in the initial years following my spinal-cord injury, I keenly felt the absence of role models that provided a way to envision myself as an artist with a disability – so I determined to be my own role model. I recall the day I realized that I had (*for the first time ever*) seen a wheelchair user in a TV commercial for a major, popular, nationally-branded product. It was 1982 and I recall wondering, “Maybe things are beginning to change?”

In the years following I viewed diverse video projects, enjoyed live performing artists, studied with integrated dance companies and read about various artist/activist/advocates who were challenging the boundaries of imagination, artistic skill and cultural stereotypes by inciting exciting conversations and creative discourse.

And things have changed. These days, I am no longer surprised when I see a regular character who is a wheelchair user on a major US network’s popular prime-time television show. The most notable change I’ve observed is that there seem to be fewer actors without disabilities playing characters with disabilities, and a few more performers with disabilities playing both characters with disabilities and roles that are not disability specific. The summer 2016 issue of *Equity News* is covered with a photo montage of diverse actors, some with visible disabilities, populating both front and back covers, highlighting the story “Change the Stage.” This crucial shift in point of view is one that the mass media and the entertainment industry need to understand, embrace and practice regarding the representation of people with disabilities in any media: “Nothing about us without us.” Our voices need to be authentically included in the larger cultural conversations taking place in all the creative industries in this country.

Passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act contributed to this shift in the cultural conversation – it is one of the big things that has propelled community change. A myriad of smaller acts by Americans (and others) with disabilities compelled this much-needed change:

Access Theater * Axis Dance * Joseph Baird * Josh Blue * Kathy Buckley * Chuck Close * Kevin Connelly * Dancing Wheels * Full Radius Dance * Marquetta Johnson * Light Motion * Kitty Lund * Neil Marcus * Anthony Milella * Joy Mincey-Powell * Leslie Orr * David Roche * Nabil Shaban * Alan Shain * Brian Shaughnessy * Teal Sherer * Judith Smith * Cheryl Marie Wade * Wry Crips ...

This list is literally the *teeniest* tip of an iceberg, and it does not include very many visual artists nor a significant representation of international artists. Yet their creative endeavors consistently inspire our defiance of feeling defeated by the ill-informed assumptions made about those of us labeled “disabled.” They motivate our resistance to relinquishing our civil right (as citizens) to pursue personal dreams of professional artistry and creative living. These are the many, simple, mundane, daily acts of advocacy, activism and artistry that mold each of us into individual agents of creative change.

These days, I am
**NO LONGER
SURPRISED**

when I see a regular character who is a
**WHEELCHAIR
USER** on a major US network’s popular prime-time television show.

PERSPECTIVES



JAEHN CLARE, MA, (pronounced “Jane”) currently serves as the executive director for VSA arts of Georgia, Inc.



No Limits: Celebrating Georgia Artists With Disabilities exhibition

In the circle approach,
**EVERYONE
CONTRIBUTES**
to the community based
on their abilities, and
all are **VALUED
EQUALLY.**

REAL
COMMUNITIES
PARTNERSHIPS



SUMAYA KARIMI is the GCDD Real Communities organizing director.



Basmat Ahmed (left) works with the Al-Tamyoz Community Building Group to build deeper relationships and find ways to make social change in Clarkston.

REAL COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIPS

Real Communities Collaborates to Impact Change

1 Real Communities Partnerships, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) award-winning initiative, began as a place where people of all abilities are valued equally and are active participants in making the community better for everyone.

Today, GCDD has a strong foundation of six partner communities, and we are in the process of adding five to seven new partners.

To further impact our communities, we must ask how can we influence change in a hierarchical system. We introduced the “circle approach” or collaborative system where we value and honor everyone.

Real Communities uses Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) and Popular Education on creating a welcoming community.

ABCD uses a circle approach to creating change in neighborhoods while using the assets the respective community has to offer. Popular Education uses a community’s assets to change an unfair system using the circle approach and through community organizing. Both of the approaches recognize and honor everyone’s assets regardless of their abilities, race, income status or education background. In the circle approach, everyone contributes to the community based on their abilities, and all are valued equally because there is no higher and lower value in the circle approach.

The goal of creating a welcoming community is done by using both approaches and collectively challenging the hierarchal leadership system.

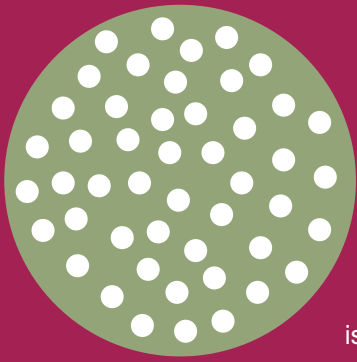
Using a triangle to represent the hierarchal system, let’s imagine the top of the triangle would have a value of 100 and the base, zero. As we navigate throughout the triangle, we determine the placement of a person by race, socioeconomic status, education, abilities,

power, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. The higher a person’s value is, the greater their opportunity to compete and flourish – which in turn does not allow a person that is valued lower or at zero to even compete. Just like a triangle, as we move up in value, the number of people in the respective caliber decreases. So in order to move up in a hierarchal system, one must leave others behind.

“The goal of creating a welcoming community is done by using both approaches and collectively challenging the hierarchal leadership system.”

Now, let’s use a circle to represent a collaborative system. All points are the same value and its value is derived by the assets of all members combined. A person’s race, socioeconomic status, education, abilities, power, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc. does not determine their value. In this approach, when one member flourishes the community benefits and there is not a competitive nature to the system. The system is an inherently nurturing and inclusive environment for all participants to lead and to be led.

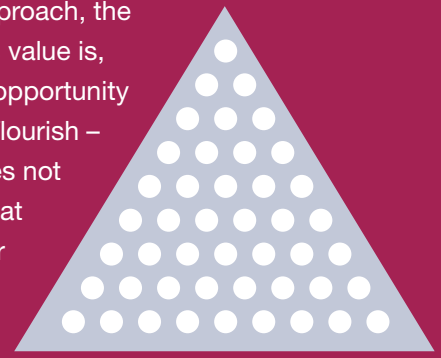
Now that we comprehend the differences in both systems, GCDD Real Communities Partnerships would like to introduce ways to influence change using the circle approach in schools, governments and economic systems.



In the circle approach, all points are the same value and its value is derived by the assets of all members combined. When one member flourishes the community benefits and there is not a competitive nature.

COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM

In the triangle approach, the higher a person's value is, the greater their opportunity to compete and flourish – which in turn does not allow a person that is valued lower or at zero to even compete.



HIERARCHAL SYSTEM

Restorative Discipline

Creating an inclusive and welcoming school environment is possible through a culture shift – from a punitive approach to a restorative approach in schools where administrators, teachers and students are responsible for the culture shift. It provides skills to create a welcoming and nurturing environment where everyone is respected. Conflict and misbehavior are used as an opportunity for learning social and emotional skills to repair harm and further build communities. The Minnesota Department of Education has adopted this approach from Native Americans and says:

“Data also shows that suspension and other exclusionary discipline policies disproportionately affect minority students. Given those negative outcomes, educators have been looking for alternatives. Educators and school leaders are interested in comprehensive whole-school approaches to improve school climate. Two approaches, in particular, are cited as alternatives to suspension and expulsion – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) as described on Minnesota’s PBIS website and Restorative Practices (RP). Both are whole-school or schoolwide in scope. Both constitute a paradigm shift away from punishment to teaching and recognizing positive behavior expectations in the former, and building community and repairing relationships in the latter. (Source: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dselsafe/clim/disc/>)

Economic Justice

Using the circle approach, the first step to economic justice is to create jobs and job security to allow people to have an independent life. When we are discussing prosperity, the conversation and focus should be on wealth distribution and access. A job is an important first step, however, fair access to the market regardless of one’s abilities, race or class is the foundation of economic justice.

One way to ensure that people of all backgrounds and abilities have access to the market is through micro-enterprises and social cooperatives. GCDD Real Communities would like to introduce social cooperatives in hopes to decrease poverty. This can be achieved by creating job security, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth of wealth.

What is a Social Cooperative?

A social cooperative is owned by groups of people with and without disabilities. A sustainable market is created through focusing on long-term economic growth, social development, and environmental responsibility. The capital must be owned by all the members and democratically controlled, while creating jobs for people who do not have access to wealth. This allows equitable contribution of wealth



and there is not a focus on short-term profit maximization. For example, some co-ops use three percent of their income to fund other co-ops hence participating in equitable contribution of wealth.

“Social cooperatives are specialized in the provision of social services or reintegration of disadvantaged and marginalized workers (disabled, long-term unemployed, former detainees, addicts, etc.) A large number of such cooperatives have been set up in Italy but also in other EU countries. Most of them are owned by their workers while offering the possibility or providing for the obligation (according to the national laws) to involve other types of members (users, voluntary workers, etc.)” (Source: International Organization of Industrial and Services Cooperatives – <http://www.cicopa.coop/What-is-a-cooperative.html>)

The first art social co-op which is owned by people with disabilities is in New York.

The circle approach gives communities a fair chance to succeed through employment, housing and more. As the Real Communities Partnerships grow, its impact in social justice and disability justice is greater using a collaborative system like the circle approach.

(Photo above) The Forsyth Farmers’ Market is a Real Communities Partnership that is working to build a more welcoming Savannah community using the circle approach.

We have a **GREAT DEAL OF WORK TO DO** so that Georgia citizens with the most significant disabilities are offered the tools and supports necessary to work in an **INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE.**

Discovery: Focusing on Strengths, Gifts, Talents and Skills for Inclusive Work



By Doug Crandell

The systems that provide funding for disability services and supports are rooted within a deficit-based viewpoint. To qualify for Social Security Income, Medicaid and vocational rehabilitation services, we have to be evaluated as having “functional limitations” and/or gaps in “activities of daily living.”

There has to be something “wrong” and “fixable” in order to receive funding. While this is necessary for a system to provide services and supports for people with significant disabilities, it isn’t very helpful once that determination has been made, especially when employment is the goal.

A better approach is something known as Discovery, a type of person-centered career planning that focuses on a job seeker’s strengths, gifts, talents and skills rather than deficits and problems. As we search for suitable employment, all of us downplay our weaknesses, and tend to highlight our strengths. Yet many job seekers with disabilities are evaluated in a human service setting, and then prescribed a set of goals to remove the identified issues that need improvement.

In contrast, in the Discovery process, a team helps identify the job seeker’s most positive traits and follows those up with a focused set of job development activities. Instead of relying solely on jobs that are advertised or posted, the team searches for an employment culture that resembles the job seeker’s strengths, skills and interests, and begins getting to know the businesses through tours, interviews and social capital building. Thereafter, a process of negotiation is undertaken where ideal conditions of employment are the focus, including identifying tasks, contributions and duties that will be expected. This process has been called Customized Employment (CE). It is defined by the Workforce Innovation

and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 as, “Competitive integrated employment, for an individual with a significant disability, that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs and interests of the individual with a significant disability, designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies.”

The final implementation date of WIOA was July 1, 2016, making CE a standard service and support, which a state vocational rehabilitation agency should be capable of offering along with its intellectual and developmental disability partners. This policy development creates a pathway to employment for those job seekers with disabilities who for too long have been evaluated as “not employable.”

We have a great deal of work to do so that Georgia citizens with the most significant disabilities are offered the tools and supports necessary to work in an inclusive workforce. We can all start with focusing on the positive rather than the negative. A father at a recent conference put this most succinctly, stating: “Shouldn’t our systems and funding be centered on how a person with a disability can work, rather than why they cannot?”

Families, counselors, job seekers and educators can start now by learning about Discovery, CE and person-centered supports. Planning for an inclusive workforce starts with highlighting and capturing a job seeker’s most positive contributions!



DOUG CRANDELL is a senior consultant with Griffin-Hammis Associates, Inc., and on the faculty of the Institute on Human Development and Disability at the University of Georgia. For the last four years, Doug has provided training and technical assistance to Georgia’s supported providers through a joint effort with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government. He is a subject matter expert with the Office of Disability Employment Policy in Washington, DC and is currently working with several states to restructure their employment supports to include evidence-based supported employment, customized employment and self-employment.

Crandell was one of the many presenters at the Georgia Evolution Conference.

Discovery and Customized Employment:
http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/CE-and-Group-Discovery-FAQs.pdf

The Rhythms and Patterns of Life

By Pat Nobbie, PhD

In the last issue of *Making a Difference*, I wrote about my conflicted opinion of the reality show *Born this Way* and how I wasn't sure it was a realistic portrayal of the experience of families with members who have Down syndrome, or if it was even important that the portrayals rang true. In this issue we want to continue exploring the representations of people with disabilities in media, whether TV, movies or print.

Since *Born this Way*, I've also begun watching *Speechless* whose main character is a high school student with cerebral palsy who doesn't speak but uses a light-activated wand device, his occasionally rabid Mom, a couple of quirky siblings and accommodating Dad; and I've been reading the Disability weekly columns in *The New York Times* written by people who experience disability in various ways and their observations on some aspect of "life with."

"I've become so sensitized that I cringe at portrayals based on either pity or heroism."

What makes a good portrayal of people with disabilities in the media, or a good portrayal of people of any diverse characteristic for that matter? What makes that portrayal appeal to the broader public so that we react to it, nod, think, oh yeah, laugh or cry, not at the person or situation, but with? I had to back up from watching, listening and reading to think about this.

At the AUCD (Association of University Centers on Disabilities) annual conference, I watched the movie, *Valuing Lives: Wolf Wolfensberger and the Principle of Normalization*, and a short phrase in the film struck me as the benchmark for assessing the integrity of media portrayals of people with disabilities or indeed, as I said above, anyone from a diverse background.

The Swedish psychologist who preceded Wolf wrote that the historical segregation and isolation of people with disabilities deprived them of "experiencing the rhythms and patterns of life." I considered this principle against the TV shows I've seen, and it provided a lens through which to view them. Are the individuals portrayed experiencing the rhythms and patterns of life that a non-disabled person would experience? Or are they portrayed as "special" or somehow "other than?" JJ, the young man in *Speechless* is shown experiencing all the rhythms and patterns involved in navigating high school, including running for class president, getting drunk at an illicit party, and teaching his classmates to think about the barriers to his inclusion in creative and humorous ways. The writers of *The New York Times* column Disability, are diverse, honest, occasionally in your face, occasionally funny, but they meet my new filter of reflecting the rhythms and patterns of life.

I'm no media expert, but I know what I like, and now I maybe have a better idea of why. I've become so sensitized that I cringe at portrayals based on either pity or heroism. One thing I have always said about Mia is that she is who she is. She's not always happy and loving. She can be crabby, stubborn and as I've also said, smart enough to be manipulative! But she is who she is because she does experience the rhythms and patterns of life of her family, her job, her neighborhood, her faith community and her friends. The extent that these rhythms and patterns of life are available and accessible to us all will determine how authentic our representation is in the world.

What makes a

GOOD PORTRAYAL

of people with disabilities

IN THE MEDIA,

or a good portrayal

of people of

ANY DIVERSE

characteristic for that matter?



PAT NOBBIE, PhD,
Mia's mom

MIA'S SPACE



I'm glad I work for

THE ROVING LISTENERS.

What we do is good, and

DOING GOOD IS WHAT I'M ALL ABOUT.

STRAIGHT TALK

Building Communities with Roving Listeners

By Lucas Rice



My name is Lucas Rice. I live in Kathleen, GA. I began working with the Macon Roving Listeners in early June. Even though I am still in the learning process, I can tell that some changes have been made in the areas that have been listened to in the previous years.

In the past, the residents were asking for parks or playgrounds to be built for their children. Well, now there is a playground where the kids play all the time. The residents also inquired about an activity center, and one is being built now. Changes don't have to always be seen. They can be felt. Some of the people that we interview are thankful that we spoke to them. We care about their opinions and values. Once they know that we care and share them, the connection is made. This connection allows them to build on their beliefs, values, opinions and ideas. Basically it makes them stronger than they were. So not only do we change the environment, but we also change the people within that environment.

Every first Monday of the month, we have community dinners. We are trying to establish a family type setting. At this dinner, we inform the residents about our work and brief them on our future plans for the neighborhood. This also allows them to be heard, and we have their input to work with. These dinners are also an opportunity for the residents to meet one another. We may introduce a resident of Macon to another resident of that area because they have similar ideas, passions and opinions. We also had a couple of cookouts this summer. We always invite parents to bring their kids because children are also part of the community.

Half of the people who work for the Roving Listeners have a developmental disability. I'm blind, and I have always been blind. From observing people that we have interviewed this summer, and from my personal experience, people find those with a disability running their own lives as an inspiration. It is something that

I noticed about people, and some have told me that they find me inspiring because I can find my classes, go to my dormitory and much more. For example, I always hear: "Wow, man. I've been watching you for a while. You seem to know the campus quite well. You are an inspiration to me. Keep it up." I always say that people are too easily impressed because I am not trying to inspire anyone, but nevertheless, they are inspired. When speaking of inspiration, motivation isn't that far behind. People with disabilities are a motivation to those without disabilities. The thought process works like this – if he is successful in school, then I can do it too.

In my 21 years of life, I have met some great people who have taught me a lot. My mother, my stepfather and my teachers. Specifically, my vision teacher in high school, Linda Speer. I called her my school mom. She looked out for me, and she continues to look out for me. She doesn't underestimate me, and pushes me to challenge myself.

When I joined the Roving Listeners, there were two people who stood out to me. The first person I met was Zikeal Howard. He has a demeanor of a 20-something year old man. In reality, he is several years younger than that. I think of him as my trainer. He taught me how things are done, and he encouraged me to do several of the interviews. The second person is Stacey Harwell. She hired me to work for the Roving Listeners. Stacey encourages not only me, but everyone who is part of the Roving Listeners.

I'm glad I work for the Roving Listeners. What we do is good, and doing good is what I'm all about.



LUCAS RICE, 21, attends Gordon State College and lives in Kathleen, GA. He works with Macon Roving Listeners at Centenary UMC, in collaboration with GCDD Real Communities Partnerships. Lucas was born in Ethiopia and has lived in the US for the past 14 years.

"For example, I always hear: 'Wow, man. You seem to know the campus quite well. You are an inspiration to me. Keep it up.' I always say that people are too easily impressed because I am not trying to inspire anyone, but nevertheless, they are inspired."

January

January 18 – 21

Assistive Technology Industry Association Annual Conference
Orlando, FL
<https://www.atia.org/conference/>

January 19 – 20

GCDD Quarterly Meeting
Atlanta, GA www.gcdd.org

January 20 – 22

Abilities EXPO
Toronto, Canada
<http://www.abilities.com/toronto/>

January 22 – 25

Georgia Winter Institute
Columbus, GA
<http://www.georgiawinterinstitute.com/>

January 30 – 31

ADA Coordinator Conference
Jacksonville, FL
<http://www.adacoordinator.org/mpage/CoordinatorConferen>

February

February 1

GCDD Advocacy Day: DD Waivers 1 & Inclusive Post- Secondary Education
Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

February 7

GCDD Advocacy Day: DD Waivers 2
Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

February 23

GCDD Advocacy Day: Employment
Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

February 27 – March 4

CSUN Assistive Technology Conference
San Diego, CA
<http://www.csun.edu/cod/conference/2017/sessions/>

February 28

GCDD Advocacy Day: Enable Work and Families (*Family Care Act, Peach Work, Phillip Payne Personal Assistance Program*), Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

February 28 – March 3

Georgia Leadership Retreat
Dillard, GA
<http://www.oadsp.org>

March

March 2 – 4

American Foundation for the Blind Leadership Conference
Washington, DC
<http://bit.ly/1MmUXBG>

March 2 – 5

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates Annual Conference
Dallas, TX
<http://www.copaa.org/?Conference>

March 9

GCDD Advocacy Day: Home & Community (*Elder & Disabled Abuser Registry, Offensive Language, Transportation, Residential Housing Study*), Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

March 20 – 22

Disability Policy Seminar
Washington, DC
<http://www.thearc.org/dps>

April

April 3 – 5

National Council for Behavioral Health Annual Conference
Seattle, WA
<http://bit.ly/1bebKC1>

April 20 – 21

GCDD Quarterly Meeting
Atlanta, GA
www.gcdd.org

2017 CALENDAR

Planning an upcoming event? Send your information to info@gcdd.org; Subject line: "Community Calendar" by Feb. 15 to be included in the calendar. Visit GCDD's expanded online community calendar to view additional local events at www.gcdd.org/calendar-of-events.html

MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD!

Meet GA Legislators at the State Capitol

HIGHLIGHT: **January 18 – March 9**

2017 ADVOCACY DAYS

For more info or to register, visit: <http://gcdd.org/public-policy/2017-advocacy-days.html>



A Tribute to Dottie Adams: A Life's Work Well Done

Throughout her 35 years of advocacy for the disability community, Dottie Adams was known for pouring herself into the work she loved and appreciating the people she worked with. She was proud to be a child of the 60s and believed that she and her friends could, in fact, change the world.

Dottie Adams, pictured above with one of her granddaughters, was an artist who created beautiful quilts. It is estimated that she made more than 100 over her lifetime. She almost always gave them away or raffled them for her favorite charity, Relay for Life.



Dottie designed these handcrafted quilts that hang in Centenary United Methodist Church to recognize the work of GCDD's Real Communities in this congregation in Macon, GA.



With that spirit, she enjoyed a willingness to challenge the status quo. Her life and career were about civil disobedience and creating opportunities for people with disabilities. She took pride in her own generation of baby boomers who refused to settle for a simple “no.”

Dottie credits her mom for teaching her – be kind; treat people the way you would want to be treated; listen; protect children’s hearts and spirits and do the right thing. Through her many mentors, teachers and life experiences, she learned that there “was the system approach and there was the human approach.”

Her disability career began in Fitzgerald where she used her skills as Girl Scout leader and summer camp counselor to teach school-aged children with disabilities. Most of the time was spent doing normal things that simply made sense. In a short period of time, she saw a lot of progress as the kids gained confidence in their own abilities and she found a new passion in her own life.

She then worked for Barrow County Mental Health Center transitioning people with disabilities from institutions into their communities for seven years and 18 more years on the District’s Intake and Evaluation Team serving the greater Athens area.

“We were there to help people get the supports and services they needed. It was our job to make life easier on people, not more difficult. We were driven by the needs of the people, not by a set of rules. We

learned that following the lead of the people in your community was the best approach,” Dottie wrote in her blog in 2012.

“We were there to help people get the supports and services they needed. It was our job to make life easier on people, not more difficult.”

In 2002, Dottie Adams brought her life-long devotion and a great deal of real life experience to the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) where she saw room for innovation and creativity. While reminiscing, she noted she worked in the same service system with the same rules and restrictions as everyone else yet found that being person-centered gave her the authority to make things work for each and every person.

“We all need to recommit to doing what each of us can to make life easier and to share our gifts to help people get what they need. That is when we are being of service and being our best.”

In describing her career, Dottie said, “This work is not a job. It’s who I am and who I was meant to be.”

“Dottie’s impact on GCDD and Georgia’s developmental disabilities community cannot be overstated,” GCDD Executive



Dottie (center) with GCDD staff in 2012 during the Making a Difference Annual Ceremony where she was honored for her advocacy work.

Director, Eric E. Jacobson, said. “When I hired Dottie, she was already known for her fierce advocacy work on behalf of individuals and their families. I knew Dottie would build important bridges for GCDD and strengthen our network of partners across Georgia, not to mention work tirelessly on behalf of family members trying to navigate the Medicaid waiver system,” he said.

Dottie was a pioneer in developing Futures Plans for Person Centered Planning, a way of zeroing in on an individual’s interest, goals and dreams in order to help them enjoy more meaningful lives. She was key in the formation of the Direct Support Certificate Program to elevate this profession and improve the quality of the direct support experience for clients and staff as well as providers. She was among the founding

members of the Children’s Freedom Initiative to ensure that Georgia children would have the opportunity to live with families in loving homes by moving them out of institutions into the community. Dottie brought Project SEARCH to Georgia and served as its State

“This work is not a job. It’s who I am and who I was meant to be.”

Coordinator for GCDD. Project SEARCH is a nationally acclaimed employment program, involving local businesses, community organizations, schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies to create internships for high school students with disabilities.

In January of last year, Dottie was honored with an award in her name at the Georgia Winter Institute. The Dottie Adams Community Organizer Award was established to recognize persons who are mission-driven and support a diverse, inclusive community – the great qualities that Dottie brought to our disability community across the State.

Later in June, she was honored with a Proclamation from the American Association on Intellectual Disabilities as a Luminary, “in appreciation and gratitude for her leadership whose light has shown both within Georgia and far beyond.”

The members and staff of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities laud the example Dottie set for the developmental disability community and her lifelong advocacy career.



Dottie with her son and her granddaughters.

“We all need to recommit to doing what each of us can to **MAKE LIFE EASIER** and to share our gifts to **HELP PEOPLE GET WHAT THEY NEED.**”



Dottie (center) with members of the Real Communities Korean Coalition at the 2012 Making a Difference Appreciation Ceremony.



Dedicated to making positive change in the lives of all she knew, Dottie will surely be missed by many.

RESOURCES

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

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)
www.gcdd.org
404.657.2126 or
888.275.4233 (ASK.GCDD)

State Government

Georgia Senate & House of Representatives
www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx

Georgia Governor's Office
<http://gov.georgia.gov>
404.656.1776

Department of Community Affairs
www.dca.ga.gov

Georgia Housing Search
www.georgiahousingsearch.org
877.428.8844

Department of Labor
<http://dol.georgia.gov>

General Information
www.georgia.gov

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office
www.ltgov.georgia.gov
404.656.5030

In The News

Money Follows the Person Hosts PhotoVoice Exhibit

- **Georgia Money Follows The Person**
<https://dch.georgia.gov/georgia-money-follows-person-ga-mfp>
- **Georgia Health Policy Center**
<http://ghpc.gsu.edu/>

Around GCDD

Georgia Winter Institute
<http://www.georgiawinterinstitute.com/>

Disability in the Media – Changing for the Better?

GLAAD
www.glaad.org

Emory Disability Studies Initiative
www.disabilitystudies.emory.edu

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology)
www.washington.edu/doit/

Advocating to the Fullest

Open States
<https://openstates.org/>

Georgia General Assembly
www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx

2017 Advocacy Days
gcdd.org/public-policy/2017-advocacy-days.html

GCDD Advocacy Network
www.ciclt.net/sn/gre2/gre2_join.aspx?ClientCode=gcdd

Get Ready for the 2017 Legislative Session

Georgia General Assembly
www.legis.ga.gov/en-US/default.aspx

2017 Advocacy Days
gcdd.org/public-policy/2017-advocacy-days.html

GCDD Advocacy Network
www.ciclt.net/sn/gre2/gre2_join.aspx?ClientCode=gcdd

2017 Advocacy Days

2017 Advocacy Days
gcdd.org/public-policy/2017-advocacy-days.html

Georgia Evolution Conference Reimagines Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
dbhdd.georgia.gov

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
gvra.georgia.gov

Department of Community Health
dch.georgia.gov

Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts at Boston
www.communityinclusion.org/

GCDD Kicks off Second Take Your Legislator to Work Day

Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
www.gcdd.org

Perspectives

Full Radius Dance Company
fullradiusdance.org

VSA arts of Georgia
vsaartsga.org

Real Communities

gcdd.org/real-communities/real-communities-partnerships.html

Expert Update

Institute on Human Development and Disability University Center on Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service
www.fcs.uga.edu/ihdd

Discovery and Customized Employment
http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadable_version/CE-and-Group-Discovery-FAQs.pdf

Straight Talk

Macon Roving Listeners
maconrovinglisteners@gmail.com



Building Relationships. Making a Difference.

Announcing GCDD Magazine Improvements . . .

New Spanish Version!

GCDD's latest *Making a Difference* Magazine is now available in Spanish!

¡La edición más reciente de la revista de GCDD, *Marcando la Diferencia*, está ahora disponible en español!

Going forward, all magazines will be available in both Spanish and English versions online.



Plus – Audio Version now accessible online!

Just go to the current issue page and scroll down to view audio feed.



Join Our Conversation



Like us on Facebook @

facebook.com/georgiaddcouncil



Follow us on Twitter @

twitter.com/georgiacouncil



gcdd.org



Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities
2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 26-246
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
404.657.2126, www.gcdd.org
Address Service Requested

MAKING **a** DIFFERENCE

A quarterly magazine of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities VOLUME 17, ISSUE 3

WINTER 2017

2017 ADVOCACY DAYS

REGISTER TODAY!



**MAKE YOUR
VOICES HEARD!**

**Meet GA Legislators
at the State Capitol**

SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

- February 1: DD Waivers Day 1 & Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Day
- February 7: DD Waivers Day 2
- February 23: Employment Day
- February 28: Enable Work and Families Day
- March 9: Home & Community Day

