

Making a Difference

SPRING
2021

GCDD'S 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



HCBS
Medicaid
Waivers



Inclusive
Post-Secondary
Education



Competitive,
Integrated
Employment

DISABILITY IN **ALL** POLICY

.....

gcdd.org



New Georgia
Transportation
Projects Seek to
Improve Services

Making a Difference

A quarterly digital magazine from GCDD

VOLUME 21, ISSUE 4

SPRING 2021

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is driven by its Five Year Plan (2017-2021) goals of education; employment; self-advocacy; Real Communities; and formal and informal supports. The Council, charged with creating systems change for individuals with developmental disabilities and family members, will work through various advocacy and capacity building activities to build a more interdependent, self-sufficient, and integrated and included disability community across Georgia.

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by Clay Voytek
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Making a Difference magazine is now available online in an expanded website experience at <https://magazine.gcdd.org/> in: English, Spanish, audio and large print. Previous issues are archived on the website as well.

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NOW IS THE TIME TO GET VACCINATED

It has been over a year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since then, we have struggled with how the virus might impact us or a loved one. We've worn masks and isolated ourselves from others. When people got sick and went into the hospital, we could not visit them.

Our brothers and sisters living in nursing facilities have been left alone, and many have passed away without the comfort of friends and family. Our only hope was that scientists would develop an effective vaccine.

On March 3, 2021, Governor Brian Kemp announced that people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their caregivers were eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccine is a safe and effective way to make sure you don't get COVID-19 and don't acquire life-threatening symptoms as a result. Now is the perfect time for ALL of us to get vaccinated. While the governor has announced that many Georgians are eligible, there remain vaccine shortages in many places such as metro Atlanta. It has not been easy, but I know that the vaccine is the best way to begin our journey back to normal.

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) remains in close discussions with the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) about how people with disabilities can get vaccinated. [Visit their website to learn more](#), and read these [questions and answers from DPH](#) for additional information.

Bottom line: if you are reading this and have not been vaccinated – please go and get your vaccine.

As we struggle with this 100-year pandemic, we also fight efforts by people attempting to restrict our right to vote. While the virus may have attacked our health, voter suppression attacks our dignity and ability to live self-determined lives. As advocates we must let our elected officials know that we should be expanding opportunities for people to vote, not limiting access. As leaders of the disability movement have chanted for years, disability rights are indeed civil and human rights.

Finally, the Georgia General Assembly has wrapped up another session. It was a session unlike any I have experienced. Most Georgians were not allowed in the Capitol due to COVID-19 restrictions. For many of us, using technology like Zoom allowed us to keep up with activities going on under the Gold Dome. What I do know is that legislators heard you loud and clear. They heard from families concerned about loved ones with significant disabilities being moved from their own homes to get the supports they need. They heard Georgia must try another approach to address the growing Medicaid waiver waiting list that currently includes over 7,000 people.



Eric E. Jacobson

To assist your advocacy efforts, GCDD premiered “[6,000 Waiting](#),” a short film about three Georgians on the waiting list. One scene told the story about when your advocacy efforts overwhelmed the Capitol telephone system – YOUR EFFORTS. GCDD can provide you information and opportunities to come to the Capitol. But the power to create change does not come from GCDD. It is YOU, the people, who have the power to change the hearts and minds of elected officials. GCDD continues to work to amplify your voice. [Learn more about the film and read additional stories from Georgians with disabilities.](#)

READ OUR LEGISLATIVE RECAP TO LEARN MORE ABOUT VOTING LEGISLATION, WAIVER FUNDING AND OTHER ISSUES ADDRESSED.



We hope you enjoy reading this magazine, and we want to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts by writing to Managing Editor Hillary Hibben at hillary.hibben@gcdd.ga.gov.

Eric E. Jacobson

Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE COVID VACCINE WITH US.





East Georgia Makes Higher Education an Easy CHOICE

by Clay Voytek

Theresa Davis retired from her position as a special education instructor and high school transition coordinator after more than a decade, but she chose to continue working with young adults with disabilities who wanted to attend college after high school.

A group of students and mentors with East Georgia State's CHOICE program socialize on campus. Photo courtesy of East Georgia State.

Davis, who has 35 years in education, now serves as the director of the Creating Higher Education Opportunities to Increase College Experiences (**CHOICE**) program at East Georgia State College (**EGSC**). **CHOICE** is an inclusive certification program for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities pursuing their next steps.

Since the 1970s, EGSC in Swainsboro, GA been a two-year, broad-access institution, meaning it accepts a large majority of applicants. Today, the college has over 3,000 students, two additional campus locations and a new student center.

CHOICE is an inclusive post-secondary education (**IPSE**) program, one of nine in the state. Ultimately, students in the program work toward a Certificate of Accomplishment in Work Readiness Skills, and participate in job-shadowing or internships before they graduate.

The program has been designated by the US Department of Education (DOE) as a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). To be recognized by the DOE under federal law, CTP programs are required to meet a level of rigor, and

they must be at least 50 percent inclusive. Davis says

students in the **CHOICE** program spend approximately 80 percent of their time in inclusive settings. CTP status allows students to apply for financial aid to attend.

The **CHOICE** program's motto is "education with a personal touch," and students provide input on their futures through person-centered planning. Along with a variety of resources and support, students are able to select classes in which they are interested over the course of four semesters, while learning and adjusting in a small-town community. Davis herself also co-teaches inclusive courses at EGSC.

"I'm there as moral support for our students, but also to lend that extra level of instruction, because what we find is that our students aren't the only ones who struggle," Davis said. "And many times, our students are the ones who have the confidence to say, 'You want me to help you with that?' And it could be a disc golf frisbee throw, or a public speaking assignment, or a word search for anatomy and physiology ... other students benefit from our students being on campus."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the **CHOICE** program had 22 students, its largest cohort to date. Last May, four students graduated from the program and participated in the school's virtual ceremony. This

semester, seven students are enrolled, where they'll work with Davis and two peer mentors.

Davis says the program benefits from institutional support and notes the benefits of working alongside the school's staff and student body. She also says state funding has a direct impact on the program's ability to positively impact young adults and those around them.

CTP programs are required to meet a level of rigor, and they must be at least 50 percent inclusive.

"Every single dollar is spent towards the advancement of a student who will go into our community, into their respective communities, and make a difference employment-wise," Davis said she would tell her legislator. "It makes a difference."

The transition out of high school is a major milestone, but Davis says no one stops going through transitions – and they never stop growing.

"We've got evidence from all of our IPSE programs, that the students do benefit from being on a college campus, totally inclusive, and making a life for themselves," said Davis. "It gives them that extra time to get it all together. Just like we need it, no different."



Uniting for Change Impact Committee at Work!

by the Uniting for Change Collective Leadership Team

Hello from Uniting for Change, a statewide network of self-advocates who are “uniting Georgians and influencing change by speaking up and taking control of our lives.”



We are a group of folks in Georgia who have intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) and we are working to make sure our voices are heard. Together with our allies and supporters, we advocate and make change.

Our Impact and Engagement Committee has been connecting with our elected officials. One thing we are concerned about in Georgia is the lack of transportation, especially for people with disabilities in rural areas of Georgia. Three gentlemen from Statesboro worked together with the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at the University of Georgia to create a short film talking about their need to access transportation in their rural community.

The film project’s website outlines: *It’s difficult to find employment without transportation. IHDD and*

GCDD, together with Pineland CSB, have created a short film about these issues, focusing on three men in Statesboro who need both work and transportation. As part of IHDD’s Advancing Employment initiative, the short film, as well as visual

resumes, were created for each gentleman. IHDD will continue to support Pineland CSB in expanding access to competitive, integrated employment.

Each of these guys wants to work, contribute and make money, instead of spending

their time in a day program for people with disabilities. A barrier they have in common with many other Georgians with I/DD is the lack of transportation to get to and from work.

Mr. William (Bo) Harvey Davis wrote to the important legislators who help make decisions about transportation in Georgia. The text of his letter is here:

“Good afternoon, Hello my name is William H. Davis. But my friends

and loved ones call me Bo. I am a member of the self-advocate and me and two of my other peers made a video on how transportation is needed in many different rural areas. I live in a small town called Statesboro where transportation for an adult like me isn’t easy to find. I am a 50 year old man that lives in a community housing with three other adults. I am also vision impaired so getting driver license will not happen. Having a transportation system that will benefit not only me but also benefit others within our city. I would love to attend football and basketball games, go to car show, and mostly get a job. I have had many jobs before, but due to lack of transportation, I am unable to work. Me and two other guys made a video of how transportation would benefit us in many different ways. If you want take a small time outside your busy day and watch our video.”

Uniting for Change sent Bo’s letter and the video to the Georgia General Assembly House and Senate Committee Transportation Members and to Sen. Jon Ossoff and Sen. Raphael Warnock.



Three Men Who Need a Ride: Shane Stone, Bo Davis and Ricky Holland

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Georgia's 2021 Legislative Recap

by Naomi Williams, GCDD Public Policy Fellow



In March 2020, we experienced the world come to a glaring and hard stop. Now in 2021, things are slowly opening back up, including the Georgia State Capitol. Legislative session feels, looks and is different for everyone this year. We are meeting via video conference and when in person, greeting each other with elbow bumps and smiling eyes as mouths are covered by masks. The capitol steps, lobby and meeting rooms are clear of advocates due to restrictions, inaccessibility or hesitancy of inadvertent exposure to COVID-19. But the work remains the same, and it is more important than ever.

Tracking Session Developments

Session started out very slow. During the first month, we followed fewer than 20 bills. As Crossover Day (i.e., the last day for a bill to move from one chamber to the other) approached, we found ourselves working feverishly to keep up with the new bills being introduced; identifying which committee had the bill; and then racing the clock to announce action alerts to comply with the short turnaround time until the committee hearing. If there is ever a time to push controversial policies through, it seems on the heels of a pandemic is the perfect time. The environment in which we find ourselves due to the pandemic makes it much harder for advocates to be included in the democratic

process, which also means there are limited opportunities for a bill to be challenged or scrutinized. Unfortunately, the barriers also help legislators avoid difficult questions and escape accountability because they do not have exposure to as many advocates as they typically would in prior sessions.

Partnership and Collaboration

Advocacy by one is good, but to be truly informed and successful, advocacy efforts during legislative session require a multitude of organizations to join hands, hearts, phones and computers to keep up with bills that are being introduced. They must dissect and decipher verbiage and then unite and conquer to mobilize advocates to give testimony as to why their legislators should support or oppose

a particular bill. Without support from partners like the Georgia Advocacy Office and many others, the work would be nearly impossible to complete. The connections, collaborative calls, ingenuity, tenacity and reach of these grassroots tentacles are the backbone change agents needed to maintain and build integrated communities.

Bills Watched

Due to the special elections flipping Georgia to a “blue” state with regard to our choices for US Senators (meaning most Georgians voted for democratic candidates), we anticipated there to be a lot of voting bills introduced. Several were introduced quickly, and we were watching a handful at the beginning of the session. By Crossover Day, there were over 70 bills we were watching and a few omnibus bills. An omnibus bill combines different subjects and packages into one document, making it large in size and scope, which makes it difficult to scrutinize and debate with such limited time.

GCDD'S PUBLIC POLICY TEAM



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DISABILITY IN ALL POLICY

Throughout session, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) alerted advocates to, and publicly testified against, many concerning voting proposals, such as ending no-excuse absentee voting, prohibiting drop boxes, and requiring a state-issued ID number to receive an absentee ballot, and have sent out multiple action alerts as the proposals were removed, modified and placed in other bills. The process ended with [Senate Bill 202](#) rising to the top in terms of priority, passing on March 25 and being quickly signed into law by Governor Brian Kemp on the same day.

GCDD released a statement regarding the bill, including what is and is not included in the legislation. [You can read our summary of Senate Bill 202 here.](#)

Although much of our advocacy efforts focused on the numerous voting bills introduced, GCDD also tracked the following bills and resolutions:

HB 128 (Gracie's Law):

GCDD has supported this bill since it was originally introduced in 2020. This bill would prohibit discrimination of potential organ transplant recipients based on disability status. People with disabilities have been denied life-saving organ transplants due to some healthcare providers' discriminatory ideas regarding the abilities and quality of life of people with disabilities.

We are thrilled to announce that Gracie's Law passed out of the

House and Senate, meaning it now awaits Governor Kemp's signature to officially become law in Georgia! Gracie's Law was amended in the Senate to include language stating a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) order cannot be issued for a minor patient without parental consent.

NEXT STEPS: Thank your state representative and senator for supporting Gracie's Law, and call Governor Kemp's office to share your thoughts on House Bill 128 becoming law!

HR 372 (Georgia's Employment First Council):

This is an Urging Resolution for the Employment First Council to develop recommendations to transition practices from paying below minimum wage to providing competitive and integrated employment options for people with developmental disabilities – GCDD worked with Rep. El-Mahdi Holly to introduce this resolution in conjunction with our third Advocacy Day on competitive, integrated employment.

Given the limited time left of session when HR 372 was introduced, it was unable to make its way to passage this year; however, we just finished up the first year of our biennial, meaning we have one more year for bills and resolutions to pass without having to be reintroduced. We are looking forward to continuing our advocacy efforts around this important House Resolution next year!



A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

by Naomi D. Williams, GCDD
Public Policy Fellow

I am a health educator, systems navigator and parent of a child with chronic and complex medical conditions and assigned a medical label of profoundly disabled.

Years ago, before I was a parent, I worked for an organization that addressed disparities in maternal and child health. I had the opportunity to advocate and meet with my federal legislators in Washington, DC during the legislative session. It was a small and short introduction into government and public policy.

This year is the first time I have participated in legislative session and Advocacy Days in Georgia. To say it has been enlightening and eye opening is an understatement.

The further the session progressed, and the more engrossed in the details I became, the harder - mentally and emotionally - it was to keep up and process what I was learning, seeing, hearing and living.

As the parent and primary caregiver for a person with disabilities (my son), it became difficult to focus, compartmentalize and detach from the biases attached and implications and consequences that would result if certain bills passed.

To see the work being done by GCDD, self-advocates and parent advocates like me, gives me the confidence to know that the disability community is working hard to be heard, and shows why it's even more important to advocate where the bills are introduced and signed into law.



If there is ever a time to push controversial policies through, it seems on the heels of a pandemic is the perfect time.

SB 208 (End the Waitlist in Five Years):

This bill directed the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) to end the NOW/COMP waiver waitlist within the next five years, subject to funds being available. The bill also indicated that new waivers cannot be funded by cutting services to already existing waivers. This bill serves as a priority statement, and GCDD would like to see all senators and representatives supporting the vision of SB 208 by signing on and ensuring sufficient funds are directed to DBHDD's budget during the appropriations process.

Although Senate Bill 208 did not pass this year, on March 30, State Senator Sally Harrell held a press conference with advocates, calling on legislators to fully fund the waitlist within five years, and GCDD looks forward to working together to make sure this important bill sees movement next session.

HB 272 (Raise the Age Act):

This is a bill to raise the adult criminal age from 17 to 18 years of age, thus including people who are 18 years old in juvenile court. Although House Bill 272 did not pass this year, there is still a chance for it to pass next year during the second year of Georgia's biennial session.

HB 43 (Vehicle Registration Note):

This bill would provide an opportunity for a person to note if they have a mental, physical or neurological condition that impacts their communication on a vehicle registration form. This information would then be available to law enforcement when they submit a vehicle tag inquiry. House Bill 43 passed the House and Senate and is on the governor's desk for his signature. Contact the governor's office to let him know your thoughts on the bill.

SB 80 (Ensuring Transparency in Prior Authorization Act):

This bill aimed to improve access to care by requiring insurers to be transparent about their prior authorization procedures and to

notify providers in advance of denying coverage for a service. GCDD signed on to support this bill with a group of health advocate organizations.

Senate Bill 80 passed unanimously out of the House and Senate, meaning it moves to the governor's desk for his signature. Thank your representative and senator for their vote, and call the governor's office to share your thoughts.

SB 47 (Special Needs Scholarship):

This bill is an expansion of the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship, making students with a 504 plan eligible to apply to the program. GCDD had concerns last session given the rights that parents were being asked to waive for their children, and we worked with advocates in favor of the bill to amend the language.

Senate Bill 47 passed both the House and Senate and is now at the governor's desk. Call his office and let them know your thoughts on the bill.

HB 290 (Hospital & Nursing Homes):

This bill was originally a visitation for hospital and long-term care facility bill but was changed in the House while in the Committee

NEXT STEPS

Although the 2021 legislative session has ended, our advocacy does not stop. The need to advocate is still important, and the time is now. Here are four things you can do in the "off season:"

1



Sign up to join our advocacy network.

2



Contact the governor's office to let him know your thoughts on the bills that passed (Note: he can still veto a bill or sign it into law).

on Human Relations and Aging to include “legal representative” language. GCDD opposed this bill due to the addition and confusion about the role and privileges of said “legal representative.” The Senate Health and Human Services Committee removed the concerning language, and the bill passed the Senate as amended. The House attempted to reinsert the concerning language but the bill was ultimately tabled in the Senate, meaning it will remain on the table until the next legislative session.

APPROPRIATIONS

As always, a large portion of our attention and advocacy is placed on the appropriations, or budget, process. Budget decisions are critical to ensure funding is available for the necessary services and supports for people with disabilities. Last year, state agencies endured steep budget cuts due to the impact of COVID-19 on revenue. There were some concerns before the start of this session that there might be additional budget cuts related to COVID; however, due to reopening decisions and federal relief, there were actually savings identified in the amended FY21 budget, which allowed funds to be directed to one-time bonuses for state employees earning less than \$80,000 annually.

ITEMS SUPPORTING THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY IN THE FY22 “BIG BUDGET”



- **100 new NOW/COMP waiver slots**
- **Approximately \$12.3 million to provide a five percent provider rate increase, subject to approval by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services**
- **Approximately \$4.7 million to restore the family support funds that were cut during last year’s budget cuts**
- **Approximately \$1.5 million for respite services with priority for rural communities**
- **A total of \$67,157 to restore GCDD’s one-time cut to the inclusive post-secondary education budget**
- **Language to direct DBHDD to provide a report to legislators by December 1, 2021, which will include how the agency plans to continue serving the 188 families impacted by the recent proposed changes to the COMP waiver**

Regarding the FY22 “big budget” (starting July 1, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022), the following items were included to support the disability community (see chart top right):

The budget bill passed both the House and Senate and is awaiting the governor’s signature. The governor has the ability to veto line items in the budget – which means it is important that we contact his office to let them know what we would like to see remain in the budget.



THANKS TO ALL OUR ADVOCATES FOR THEIR HARD WORK DURING THE 2021 SESSION!

**Information current as of April 9, 2021*

3



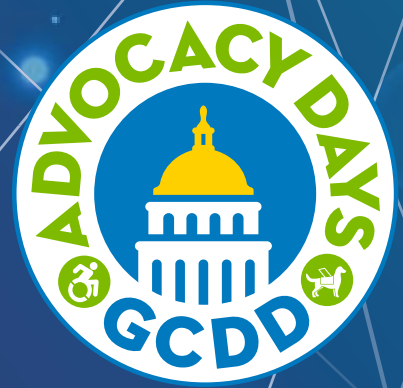
When you speak with the governor’s office, make sure to let him know you would like him to prioritize the needs of the disability community during the drafting of his FY23 budget proposal, which begins to take place during the summer.

4



Schedule an appointment to meet with your legislator during off season; find your legislator(s) here.

2021 Virtual Advocacy Days Bring Greater Access to Event for People with Disabilities



Over 550 disability advocates registered to virtually attend the 2021 GCDD Advocacy Days – the first time the DD council has hosted the days exclusively online since the initiative’s inception.

I can be involved in this program while taking care of my daughter who has [multiple disabilities] and a medically fragile nature.

- Family Member -

Hosted by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) in January, February and March, advocates attended three full-day sessions to learn more about policies impacting the disability community and how to advocate for their needs in a virtual world.

Three different Advocacy Days

focused on policies affecting people with disabilities and brought together advocates from across the state to hear about the issues and work together to brainstorm actions they could take to advocate from home. Topics included home and community-based services (HCBS), inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) and competitive, integrated employment.

Additionally, GCDD is slated to host its inaugural Virtual Advocacy Awards Ceremony on April 15. The ceremony allows the council to celebrate all the hard work of the advocacy community during the 2021 legislative session. Stay tuned for a recap of the event and a list of honorees!

I really appreciate that you created this kind of platform we can join at home.

It was extremely informative and encouraging. While I am sorry it had to be a virtual event, for me, it was a blessing because it allowed me to attend.

- Family Member -

I felt there was so much [valuable] information provided. I have always been an advocate for individuals with disabilities. This gave me some suggestions on how to further address these legislators.

- Professional -

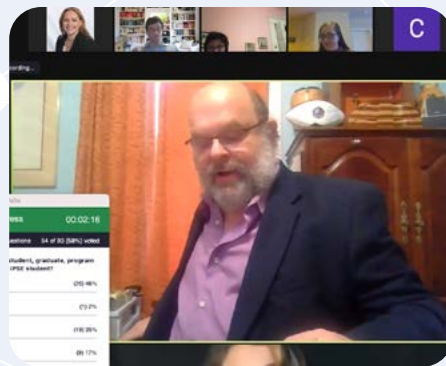
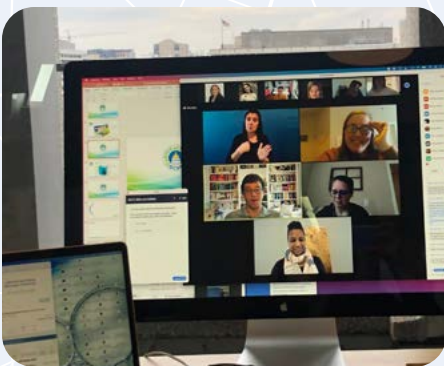
Read what advocates had to say about our Virtual Advocacy Days:

Honestly, the fact that this is virtual has actually made it a lot easier for us to participate. It has been a great program so far.

I learned so much about how to advocate for ourselves and others. I would definitely recommend this to anyone wanting to learn to advocate and also how the Americans with Disabilities Act changed the world.

- IPSE Student -

THE NEW NORMAL - 2021 ADVOCACY DAYS HOSTED EXCLUSIVELY ONLINE!



BY THE NUMBERS:

REACH (Across 3 Events)

360
PARTICIPATED



552
REGISTERED

MICROSITE METRICS

3467

SITE VISITS
(registration &
resources/info)



1653

UNIQUE VIEWS
to inclusive post-
secondary education



1799

UNIQUE VIEWS
to competitive,
integrated employment



Plus: 15 microsite views for waiver materials (through a separate platform)

New Georgia Transportation Projects Seek to Improve Services

by Clay Voytek

In October 2020, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) collected public input data from over 300 respondents across the state.



For those respondents, the number one barrier to improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families was a lack of resources or not knowing what resources are available.

GCDD Analysis

Transportation is one critical but underdeveloped resource for people with disabilities in Georgia. It can be the avenue to a doctor's appointment, to grocery shopping, or even employment. All of these everyday tasks can become vastly harder when an individual's transportation needs aren't met. Many communities do not have access to needed solutions, nor do people know what solutions are currently available or being developed in their community.



In July 2020, as part of the comprehensive review and analysis for the council's Five-Year Strategic Plan, GCDD noted that MARTA Mobility is Georgia's ADA-designated complementary paratransit service, providing accessible transportation to people with disabilities.

The ADA, or the Americans with Disabilities Act signed into law by President George H. W. Bush,

“prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation and all public and private places that are open to the general public.”

Challenges with MARTA Mobility include a 24-hour advance appointment notice, no trip drop-off time and the service only being available in the metro Atlanta areas that have bought into the MARTA system.

The GCDD analysis also found that approximately two million Georgians, both with and without disabilities, live in rural areas where transportation is of greater concern, and Georgians in 118 rural counties are served by 65 small, on-call van systems.

Coordinated Transportation System – Department of Human Services

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) is one resource for individuals with unmet transportation needs. DHS has its own program called the Coordinated Transportation System (CTS). The program includes a number of offices staffed in each DHS region, where they manage a fleet of government vehicles and the web-based request system, called TRIP\$.

Transportation is one critical but underdeveloped resource for people with disabilities in Georgia.

The program fits into DHS's broader role as a state agency, providing services to promote self-sufficiency, safety and well-being for all Georgians. CTS is the designated program in Georgia to receive Section 5310 funding. Section 5310 is a federal program designed to fund transportation projects to enhance mobility for seniors and those with disabilities, under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

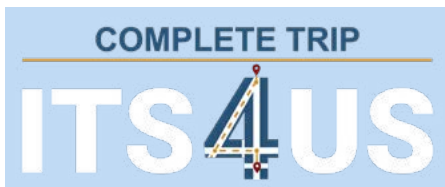


Transporting People For a Better Quality of Life

CTS provides a vital service to rural areas without public transit, but additional transportation programs are currently being developed in Georgia to further meet the need, including two from the [Atlanta Regional Commission](#) (ARC).

Safe Trips in a Connected Network (ST-CTN) System - Atlanta Regional Commission

This February, [ARC announced that it was awarded](#) with a grant through the [US Department of Transportation's \(USDOT\) "Complete Trip - ITS4US Deployment Program,"](#) to begin phase one of a project developing a more accessible transportation system in Gwinnett County.



The proposed ARC project is called the Safe Trips in a Connected Transportation Network (ST-CTN) system, and the ultimate goal is to combine a number of technologies and solutions to create a more equitable way of traveling in the county. The total amount of the three-phased award is over \$9 million.

Maria Roell, a senior planner with [ARC's transportation group](#), says ST-CTN will have a focus on underserved communities in Gwinnett, including people with disabilities, older adults and those with limited English proficiency. Roell says considering the user perspective is essential to the first two phases of the project.

"It's about making complete trips easier for people with mobility issues," Roell said.

"There's a lot of populations that they're trying to reach."

Transportation is an important policy issue for many people with disabilities in Georgia. Every individual has different travel needs, and services can be a challenge to navigate for those that don't have their own means of transportation.

Micro Transit in Gwinnett and DeKalb Counties

ARC has another transportation project underway in metro Atlanta – a micro transit pilot in Gwinnett and DeKalb counties that is partnering with the [Center for Pan Asian Community Services](#) (CPACS) to allow users to request CPACS shuttles to a specific location. The project is currently halfway through the first phase of an 18-month timeline, and it could represent a wider embrace of both micro transit and transportation equity in the counties.

Joseph Yawn, a transportation technology administrator with ARC, says part of the grant requirement for the CPACS



EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS DIFFERENT TRAVEL NEEDS, AND SERVICES CAN BE A CHALLENGE TO NAVIGATE FOR THOSE THAT DON'T HAVE THEIR OWN MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION.



project is an inclusive planning effort. "The stakeholder committee is all driven by riders, so they are really shaping what they want the technology to be."

Over the next two years in Gwinnett, the micro transit pilot will be completed, and ARC will continue to develop ST-CTN with a variety of partners. One of these will be the [Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia](#) (SILCGA), which will lead the project's stakeholder engagement.

Roell says the opportunity to increase equity is huge, and ST-CTN is in the early stages. "Phase three is really when we start talking about, where else do we want to put it?"

2 MILLION
Georgians, with and without disabilities, live in rural areas where transportation is of greater concern

118 rural counties are served by:
65 small, on-call van systems

Source: GCDD Analysis Oct. 2020



What's Happening in Washington? Federal Disability Policy Updates

By Erin Shea, Center for Public Representation

ADVOCACY ALERT!

Comments about the discussion draft of the HCBS Access Act are needed by April 26! Email now to HCBSComments@aging.senate.gov

It's been a busy 2021 so far, which has brought some important wins for the disability community. Below we provide a few key updates and what we expect to see in the coming months.

COVID-19 Response

American Rescue Plan Act:

On March 11, the latest COVID-19 relief bill, the American Rescue Plan Act, was signed into law.

The bill does not respond to all of our concerns, but it does address some particularly urgent needs that have been ignored in prior coronavirus relief bills. These include dedicated funding for home and community-based services (HCBS). HCBS funding is critical to help individuals with disabilities and older adults remain safely in their homes rather than being forced into nursing homes and other congregate settings that have faced severe COVID-19 outbreaks.

The bill also addresses other priorities. It contains \$1,400 stimulus checks that, unlike stimulus checks provided in previous relief bills, adult dependents are eligible to receive. It also provides much-needed education

funding that includes dedicated funding for special education services, as well as additional nutrition funding and state aid.

Discussions around another bill meant to jumpstart economic recovery following the pandemic have begun, though consideration of any proposed plan or legislation is not expected to happen quickly. We will continue to update you as those discussions move forward.

Updates on Health Care Policies Impacting Georgia

Medicaid Work Requirements in Georgia:

In February of 2020, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) and the Center for Public Representation (CPR) submitted joint comments opposing Georgia's application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) seeking a waiver to allow the state to, among other things, impose work requirements as a condition of expanding Medicaid. Work requirements have been shown to cause people to lose their health care. Georgia's proposal is particularly harmful because, unlike other states,

it does not attempt to exempt people with disabilities or their caregivers from work requirements (although even with exemptions, people with disabilities can be impacted).

Georgia's application was approved by CMS in October, but in February, CMS notified the state that it would be reviewing its decision. We will keep you updated as CMS reconsiders Georgia's proposal.



[Read more about work requirements here.](#)

Litigation Updates

GAO v. Georgia (GNETS):

In July 2020, a motion was filed to consolidate the two lawsuits challenging the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS) – one brought by the US Department of Justice (DOJ) and the other by private advocates including the Georgia Advocacy Office and CPR – to allow both cases to be heard by the same judge. On March 9, the judge overseeing the case brought by private advocates, Judge Michael Brown, denied the motion. As a result, the two cases will continue on separate

- [More on what disability priorities are and are not included in the American Rescue Plan Act here.](#)
- [More on the bill is also available on our COVID-19 legislation page.](#)

- [More information on the GNETS case can be found here.](#)
- [More information on the public charge rule is available here.](#)

litigation tracks with each case being decided by a different judge.

In August 2020, Georgia filed a motion for judgment on the pleadings, which sought a ruling from the judge in its favor immediately, before evidence had been presented. Judge Brown denied that motion on March 9 as well.

Public Charge Litigation:

We have often discussed the public charge rule, which had put in place a new test for people applying for visas or green cards. It looked at people's health, including whether they have a disability, and whether they have used or might one day use public benefits, including Medicaid-funded HCBS on which many people with disabilities rely.

Disability advocates, including CPR, have been fighting against the discriminatory rule since it was first proposed in 2018. Litigation against the rule eventually made its way to the US Supreme Court, which was set to hear oral arguments in the coming months. In February, the Biden Administration issued an [executive order](#) to begin the process of reversing the rule, and on March 9, the DOJ [notified](#) the Supreme Court that it would no longer defend the rule. The Supreme Court then [agreed](#) to dismiss the case.

This means that the public charge rule is no longer in effect. In its place is the [1999 field guidance](#) that the government had used to make public charge determinations prior to implementing the rule.

Legislation to Watch

HCBS Access Act: The bill seeks to end what's known as Medicaid's

institutional bias. Currently, HCBS is an optional service, which means many people are left on waiting lists to access those services, while institutional services are mandatory and provided without a waiting list. It would change that by making Medicaid coverage of HCBS mandatory and providing states with additional funding for HCBS. We expect there will be many advocacy opportunities to come in support of this important bill and will continue to keep you updated.

The HCBS Access Act has not been formally introduced yet, but [a discussion draft](#) was released on March 16 by Representative Dingell (D-MI) and Senators Hassan (D-NH), Brown (D-OH) and Casey (D-PA). Their offices are seeking comments related to the discussion draft. Comments are due April 26, and can be emailed to HCBSComments@aging.senate.gov.

- [Read the fact sheet on the HCBS Access Act bill here.](#)
- [Read the full HCBS Access Act press release here.](#)

Money Follows the Person and Spousal Impoverishment Protections:

As we discussed in our last column, on December 27, the [Consolidated Appropriations Act](#) was signed into law. The bill, among other things, extended funding for the [Money Follows the Person](#) (MFP) program for three years, along with [spousal impoverishment](#) protections.

What You Should Know

- Legislative response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic includes dedicated HCBS funding and increased eligibility for stimulus payments.
- Federal health care developments continue to impact Georgians with disabilities, particularly in the context of Medicaid work requirements.
- Important updates to national litigation address discrimination in both public education in Georgia and in immigration practices and equity.
- With more opportunities to access services like HCBS and MFP, key pieces of legislation remain important to disability advocates.
- The new White House Domestic Policy Council includes a [disability policy director \(for the first time ever\)](#), which showcases a commitment to including our community in meaningful conversations.

While we were happy to see long-term extensions of these important provisions, disability advocates continue to push for permanent reauthorization. In March, two bills, [HR 1880](#) and [HR 1717](#), were introduced in the House to do just that. We will continue to monitor these bills and expect we'll need your help to get them across the finish line.

- [More on why permanent reauthorization of MFP matters here.](#)
- [Keep updated on MFP here.](#)

Notable Developments Domestic Policy Council:

For the first time ever, the White House's Domestic Policy Council includes a [disability policy director](#), Kim Knackstedt. This means that the needs of people with disabilities will be considered from the beginning as the Biden Administration develops its domestic policy agenda, providing an exciting opportunity to advance the community's goals.

These updates represent only a small portion of what we're working on. For more on our work, visit our [website](#) and connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Note: information current as of 4/9/2021

Let's Talk About Advocacy

Featuring Nandi Isaac, Self-Advocate & GCDD Council Member

Nandi Isaac, self-advocate and GCDD council member; and Eric Jacobson, executive director of GCDD sat down for a virtual interview on what advocacy means and how it helped the disability community during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Eric Jacobson (EJ): Earlier this month, alongside a strong network of advocates, we were successful in expanding vaccine access to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) across the state of Georgia. Today, I'm joined by GCDD council member and self-advocate extraordinaire Nandi Isaac for a brief conversation on effective advocacy during Developmental Disability Awareness Month and beyond. This is an important time for health care access and advocacy and we are looking forward to chatting about that today.

EJ: How do you feel your advocacy has worked to improve the lives of Georgians with developmental disabilities?

NI: My advocacy helped to open doors for people with disabilities to get vaccinated. More and more people with disabilities were registered to vote and voted by mail in ballots for the 2020 election of last year.

EJ: Great! We know advocacy can mean lots of things, so what are some simple ways that a person can advocate for themselves in their local community just to get started?

NI: One, knowing your rights and responsibilities. Two, learning how to get information on goals, standing up for your rights, signing up to support yourself, reaching out when you need support. Speaking up or writing to support yourself.

EJ: So, what should people know about becoming an advocate for things that matter to them?

NI: It matters a lot! It is very important to get all the waivers and services and supports that we need.

EJ: Well, thanks for answering those questions, Nandi!

NI: You're welcome, Eric. And, now are you ready to be interviewed, Mr. Eric?

EJ: I am.

NI: Let's get started then! Okay, agencies work in many different ways to support their visions. How does GCDD support advocates and their efforts?

EJ: Councils across the country are required by the Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights and Assistance Act, to fund self-advocacy efforts in at least a couple of different ways. First, we are supposed to fund an organization that provides self-advocacy efforts, so United for Change, which is offered by Sangha Unity Network (SUN) is one of those projects that we started funding to help promote self-advocacy across the state. We are also supposed to support leadership efforts for people with I/DD and then finally for cross-disability coalitions. So when we're working on things like addressing the waivers, we're working with people not only with developmental disabilities, but people with physical disabilities and other disabilities as a way of trying to make sure that everybody gets the services that they need. We are really involved externally in trying to help people, but also to make sure that self-advocates on the council have an opportunity to take on leadership roles and to expand their own leadership opportunities. So we think we are very involved in supporting self-advocacy and those efforts.

NI: Thank you, Eric. It's something that I learned on the council. Second question, what do people not know about GCDD and how it works to address people with I/DD?

EJ: I think one of the most important things to think about, especially around advocacy efforts, is that the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

My advocacy helped to open doors with people with disabilities to get vaccinated. More and more people with disabilities were registered to vote and voted by mail in ballots for the 2020 election of last year.



Nandi Isaac (NI): Thank you Eric, I am so excited to be here today, thanks for the opportunity to share. I advocated for the vaccine with Governor [Brian] Kemp by contacting him online. Governor Kemp added people with learning disabilities to the vaccine March 8th. I train my peers for advocacy, to rise up and speak up. We spoke to many groups on voting rights and why it is so important to vote. I created nine videos for Georgia on our valued social roles, supportive decision-making and stereotypes.

really only has 25 or 26 members at a time and that means that those are the only people we truly represent. So the power of GCDD comes from advocates across the state pushing issues that are important, then the council comes behind that effort to talk with legislators and others to push issues that are important to all people.

NI: Okay, last question. Eric, can you please tell us how people can get involved with GCDD?

EJ: I love telling people how they can get involved with GCDD. So, first of all as I just kind of mentioned – get involved in our advocacy efforts because that’s where all of our abilities to talk with legislators and others comes from. So join our advocacy network. You can go to our website, click the green button at the bottom to [join our network of grassroots advocates](#). You can subscribe to our magazine and our newsletter. [Visit our online magazine](#) to read stories about issues important to people with disabilities and their families. And finally you can get support and answers to your questions by [joining the Georgia DD Network’s monthly Zoom session on COVID-19 in Georgia](#) and supporting people with I/DD.

Really, the idea is to get involved, to make sure that you have opportunities. Without, for instance, our advocacy efforts, I don’t think people with intellectual and developmental disabilities would have gotten their COVID vaccine shots as quickly as they did. So advocacy is a really important part. Thanks for asking me that question, Nandi.

NI: You’re welcome.

EJ: And thanks for listening today to this blog!

NI: I also got my very first vaccine a couple of weeks ago and I get my last one on the 31st of [March].

EJ: Before we go, can you share a self-advocacy experience that was very momentous for you, where you realized that your efforts were paying off on an issue that was important to you?

NI: Last year, things got a little bit hectic and so it hit really, really strong with COVID. I really didn’t like the fact of being away from my community that much because I love Special Olympics. I miss my friends and it’s really hard for me to get around this pandemic thing. But I’m still holding on tight by staying busy by advocating. I have written letters to Governor Kemp; he replied to that letter and he went ahead and applied that on March 8th. It is like a miracle, it’s really astounding. Like a blessing. I got my very first vaccine a couple weeks ago and I’m going to get my last one following this week. And I think this story will not only change my life but other people’s with disabilities like I have as well. Advocates have various disabilities, so I helped them and encouraged them to get vaccines so that they can be vaccinated and be a part of the community, and do things on their own or with the help of a caregiver or a family member. That’s why I advocated to help people with disabilities get this COVID-19 pandemic shot.

I know that all of you are very busy and I want to say thank you to all of you. This has been a whirlwind of heartache one after another after another, but we go through this together and that’s why we are writing, speaking up, not just for our world but for our families and our loved ones and friends. After the pandemic is finished, there’s going to be a new normal. I don’t know how I’ll feel after that, but it is going to be really hard. But, prayer is very powerful in my family and I think prayer is the key to getting this COVID to go away.

I love telling people how they can get involved with GCDD. So, first of all – get involved in our advocacy efforts because that’s where all of our abilities to talk with legislators and others comes from.



EJ: I think I would just add that really over the last year we have heard lots of stories from individuals with developmental disabilities who felt isolated. I know that they are excited for the opportunity to return to somewhat of a normal life where they can see their friends and family and meet with them. I think the most important thing that we can do is add is what we’ve learned from self-advocates. We as an organization and we as individuals. And really this trend or important part of making sure that self-advocates are in leadership positions on DD councils and other organizations is really how we are going to change what’s happening in our society. So I just want to encourage people to extend those opportunities for leadership to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As we do that with the Georgia council, I think we are going to see more and more people step up and their message is going to be heard much better by legislators and other policymakers when it comes from them. So I want to thank you again, Nandi for doing this with us, to tell your story because we need to hear more stories like Nandi’s.

NI: Thank you Eric, thank all of you.

VIDEO INTERVIEW:
[Watch the captioned presentation by Nandi Isaac and Eric Jacobson.](#)

GCDD
GEORGIA COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

**Let's Talk About
ADVOCACY!**

featuring
Nandi Isaac, Self Advocate and GCDD Council Member &
Eric Jacobson, Executive Director

GCDD Funding Boosts Key Georgia Projects Seeking Federal Support

by Clay Voytek

For the last 35 years, the [Quick Response Research Award Program](#) has awarded small grants to a variety of academic institutions to support social and behavioral science in the wake of disaster.

Georgia State University's Center for Leadership in Disability

As the pandemic began last year, [Georgia State University's Center for Leadership in Disability \(CLD\)](#) was selected as an [award recipient](#), to explore the effects of COVID-19 on quality of life of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and direct support professionals.

CENTER FOR Leadership in Disability

After receiving the award, [Erin Vinoski Thomas](#), a research assistant professor at CLD, began a round of surveys to investigate. [Daniel Crimmins](#), the director of CLD, says the project naturally led to a conversation with the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). GCDD then

provided additional funding, so Thomas could conduct more surveys and in-depth interviews.

The Quick Response Research Award program is an effort by the [University of Colorado, Boulder's Natural Hazard Center](#), and is funded through a grant from the [National Science Foundation](#).

"The council essentially had a mechanism so they could act quickly," Crimmins said, "to really come to this better understanding of how the pandemic was affecting people with I/DD."

GCDD partnered to expand and deepen the impact of work done through the Quick Response Program by contributing funding and support to ensure it can best serve those with disabilities who live in Georgia.

Crimmins says that early mainstream reporting around the impact of the pandemic on this particular community was largely focused on quantitative data.

"No one knew what people were thinking about it, how they understood it, or how it was impacting them," Crimmins said.

Across the state, GCDD collaborates with academic institutions, advocacy organizations and service providers to work toward sustainability and equity. GCDD

seed funding and guidance has played a crucial role in stabilizing many of these groups.

Advancing Employment Technical Assistance Center

Another GCDD partnership with the [Advancing Employment Technical Assistance \(TA\) Center](#) at the [University of Georgia's Institute on Human Development and Disability \(IHDD\)](#), works to advance employment for Georgians with disabilities, while offering resources to state agencies, employers, jobseekers and providers of employment supports.



Advancing Employment

Building a community for inclusive employment in Georgia

"If it wasn't for GCDD, then we wouldn't have a TA Center," said Doug Crandell, the project director for Advancing Employment and an expert in disability employment policy at IHDD.

Crandell says that the TA Center relies on GCDD funds to support its main infrastructure. He notes the center receives some funding through the [Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency \(GVRA\)](#), but it does not receive money from any other state agencies. He

ACROSS THE STATE, GCDD COLLABORATES WITH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS, ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS TO WORK TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY.



If it wasn't for GCDD, then we wouldn't have a TA Center. The TA Center relies on GCDD funds to support its main infrastructure.

says going after federal money in other projects allows the center to continue making an impact.

In August 2020, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) announced a total of \$1 million in grants meant to establish transition pilot programs for youth and adults with I/DD. The grants were awarded to 10 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs), and UGA's IHDD is one of the grant awardees.

Crandell says the one-year pilot project will focus on the transition from college to work or graduate education for students on the autism spectrum, and it will seek to increase successful transitions. The pilot will be a collaboration with the CLD at Georgia State and GCDD, as well as with self-advocates and other partners.

Crandell points to one home-grown project from earlier this year, where Advancing Employment

partnered with the Pineland Community Service Board (CSB) in Statesboro.

Through the partnership, the center completed visual resumes for three men in the city, and State Representative Jan Tankersley agreed to be an employment reference for them.

“We get to help Pineland CSB, not only these three men, but continuing to help them build their competitive, integrated employment program,” said Crandell.

Georgia Advocacy Office

GCDD has also partnered with the Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO), the state's designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in Georgia. For the last three years, with GCDD resources and funding, GAO has operated the supported decision-making (SDM) project, working to increase adoption of SDM as an alternative to guardianship in the state.

GAO recently applied to become one of the first three states to form a community of practice through an ACL-supported, national SDM project, building on the success of a previous SDM initiative. Twenty-six applicants have been narrowed down to six finalists.

GAO Executive Director Ruby Moore says the ACL project will develop at a national level over the next five years, but the organization will support the creation of local programs by providing resources in 11 different states, including the initial three.

Moore says that if Georgia is selected by the ACL, the SDM community of practice will begin developing a cohort of youth leaders and ambassadors across the state. “It’s a very powerful



model for growing the program and targeting high-priority growth ... sort of cutting off that pipeline to guardianship that happens as people are coming of age.”

Moore is excited by the potential opportunity to collaborate on a national level, while receiving an invaluable resource infusion. She also notes that good collaboration and a strong network in the state of Georgia have made all the difference for their own collaborative SDM project.

WITH GCDD RESOURCES AND FUNDING, GAO HAS OPERATED THE SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING PROJECT, WORKING TO INCREASE ADOPTION OF SDM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO GUARDIANSHIP.

“Anytime two states trying to do the same thing talk to each other, you’re going to find nuances and differences in the way that the work got approached, what the partners were, what unique characteristics those projects have,” Moore said. “This grant allows for communities of practice to develop simultaneously across the country in at least 11 states. Even if Georgia doesn’t get picked as one of the first states, our project will go forward. And some of the principles from the national grant are in Georgia, or are working in Georgia, already.”



John McCarty (left) with his GAO attorney, Julie Kegley, in court the day his rights were restored. McCarty is a prominent voice locally and nationally for supported decision-making (SDM).

Welcoming Community Movement Gaining Momentum across Georgia

by Jennifer Bosk

A new focus has changed the 10-year-old Real Communities Initiative, funded by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), into a totally new movement.



The new logo of the Welcoming Community Movement

The program, now the Welcoming Community Movement (WCM), has shifted its goal to creating welcoming communities in which everyone understands they are valued, and their needs are heard and acted upon.

with local initiatives in developing multi-disciplinary collaborations; resources and innovations in community organizing; and practices in sustainable change. Within the next few months, a fourth coach will be added to train the local communities on think tank development and strategies. This coach will help research policies that impact people with disabilities, those of color, people who experience oppression, etc.

With the switch to WCM, change has been noticeable from its new logo to greater inclusivity and deeper community cohesiveness. “We’ve seen increased collaboration with respect to partners working together among organizations in Atlanta, LaGrange and Augusta,” said Wells. “The grassroots movement of Real Communities has caught fire, and we are seeing people get creative on how to build community during this time of COVID-19 through technology, art and various other ways. We are seeing people take risks and discuss issues of discomfort. After doing the work on themselves, they then turn outward to help others in the community.”

“Part of empowerment is people talking to each other. Equity means Black with white and those with disabilities with

those without disabilities. Inclusion doesn’t happen without talk,” added Karimi.

One such WCM community is Mixed Greens in Savannah, GA. This group of Savannah residents with and without disabilities began in 2009. Mixed Greens is currently being led by Jessica Mathis.

Today this local initiative is working on mindfulness, death issues and social justice. “We want to give people basic tips on what to do to conserve their mind/body/spirit,” explained Mathis. Part of that work is dealing with end-of-life issues in their Death Café, a safe space to share and grieve. Mathis also notes that COVID-19 gave rise to noticeable racial and income inequity in their community. “We want people with and without disabilities to be powerful allies in social justice work, to ask questions on how everyone is working to include everyone regardless of disability, color, income, etc.,” added Mathis.

She leads the Mixed Greens group with an eye on the future. “We are working on the Beloved Community Dialogue with the Episcopal Church Diocese of Georgia. The purpose of this dialogue is to help all community members learn how to end discrimination against people with

WE WANT PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES TO BE POWERFUL ALLIES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK, TO ASK QUESTIONS ON HOW EVERYONE IS WORKING TO INCLUDE EVERYONE REGARDLESS OF DISABILITY, COLOR, INCOME, ETC. ”

WCM is overseen by Global Ubuntu and is headed by its founder and co-director, Sumaya Karimi, and co-director Malaika Geuka Wells. WCM groups, located in nine Georgia counties, are being trained by three coaches in the areas of inclusion and restorative justice as well as healing and sustainability. The coaches are from Taproot (Atlanta, GA), The SEMANCO Team (Smyrna, GA), and Mattie J. T. Stepanek Foundation (Americus, GA). These coaches are training those involved



disabilities, end racism and create different pathways to economic and resource access,” Mathis added.

Out of tough times great change often comes, and so it is with ConnectAbility in Dahlonega, GA. Taking on the Welcoming Community Movement they are focusing on intentional diversity and in doing so have discovered there is more diversity in their community than originally thought. “We don’t want to highlight our differences but bring appreciation and recognition of them,” explained Jacqueline Daniel, president of ConnectAbility.

Their biggest community impact recently was due to having to adjust their annual “Thousand Words Photography” project because of the pandemic. Ten teams of people with and without disabilities came together under their common love

of photography with a goal of building relationships and making friendships. ConnectAbility worked to make the photography displays portable this year by displaying photos on sandwich boards that were placed in Hancock Park. Seven local businesses asked if they could each have a turn displaying the photography works in their company locations, calling attention to this collaboration among such a diverse group of citizens.

Reverend Vernell and Anita Cutter have joined forces with the Georgia Research Environment Economic Network (GREEN) in Savannah, GA to work on social justice issues. Their main clients are returning citizens – people who have been released from incarceration. “How do we as a community say we see you have paid your debt?” explained Anita about their goal to create a more welcoming community. Vernell has been doing the legwork in the community with one-on-one meetings with recently returned citizens with and without intellectual disabilities as well as with state and local legislators. The goal is to welcome all back into the community and help them feel they are valuable citizens.

Future plans by the Cutters include creating a Community Action Team for guiding returning individuals to embrace and work on



turning their lives around, showing society their value and to voice the stories of the issues they face as they return to their communities.

Team White of ConnectAbility's Thousand Words Photography project

The reach of the Welcoming Community Movement is growing across Georgia. Other WCM communities are being organized by:

- **Abilities Discovered, Warner Robins, GA**
- **Compassionate Atlanta, Atlanta, GA**
- **Filling in the GAPS, Hephzibah, GA**
- **Inspire Positivity, LaGrange, GA**
- **New Neighbors Network, Comer, GA**
- **Peacebuilders Camp, Americus, GA**

To read more about WCM and Global Ubuntu, please visit the Global Ubuntu website. To see other details on this GCCD-funded initiative and its other initiatives, visit www.gcdd.org.



Think Tank Coach Needed

If you are interested in applying as a coach with the Welcoming Community Movement, contact Sumaya Karimi at sumaya@globalubuntu.net.

Accessible gardening at Joy Cottage during a Mixed Greens WCM event

SPRING 2021



The Kidpreneur

by Shannon Turner, Photographer: Lynsey Weatherspoon

It's a rainy Saturday afternoon in Columbus, Georgia. The Christmas tree is up in the Le Denney house, but it's not yet been decorated. Seven-year-old Kalel, Kal for short, runs from one end of the house to the other, full of energy, going from Legos to Nerf blasters to maps to getting a popsicle out of the freezer.



Mom and Dad, Jennifer and Robert, sit on the couch for a minute to see if Kal's energy will burn out. Anyone who's ever been around a kid Kal's age knows the approach of holiday season amps everything up. With his hair freshly spiked and his Alabama football shirt pressed, Kal is ready for wherever the day's going to take him.

Kal is thriving at Johnson Elementary in Ms. Komer's full inclusion class, meaning half the students have autism. They've had to fight for Kalel to get appropriate services through the school district. At one time, despite the autism diagnosis from private psychologists, the school psychologist labeled him with mild intellectual disability, which meant he would have been put into a completely different classroom. Jennifer says this was wildly inappropriate as "they're not clinicians." She wouldn't care

if her son did have intellectual disability; he would just get more services. It took five advocates over a span of one year to help them prove that Kal has autism and as such needs the appropriate services. Some of those services include behavioral supports, teachers who are specially trained, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and adjusting language as needed.

Kal is a young entrepreneur. Sherricka Day, an Aflac employee, used her company-encouraged volunteer time to create a business development program called Minor in Business, an incubator program for "kidpreneurs." Kal took advantage of the opportunity to start his own scrap metal and recycling company called Super Scrap. He recruits individuals and businesses to become "Super Scrappers" who donate materials. With the profits he makes from recycling, Kal uses the money to invest in his own future landscaping firm. He's purchased a riding lawnmower, weed eater, hedge trimmer and multiple leaf blowers, including one with a short spout that he can already use. Jennifer and Robert are so proud of their son's ingenuity and drive.

Previously taking hip hop dance, Kal attends drama camp and Reptile Fest, and is thinking about

trying piano next year. Recently, Chuck E. Cheese sponsored "Sensory Sunday," an event to make their facility more welcoming for kids with autism. The cost of a lot of these activities are made possible by the Family Supports Program through New Horizons Behavioral Health. Jennifer submitted an application for a Medicaid waiver for Kalel in May, but she has received no response, despite the fact that they should have heard back within 45 days. They specifically hope to expand Kalel's community activities and get help with respite care.

If given a chance to speak to a legislator, Jennifer would say, "Intervention is key. He wouldn't be this far ahead if we didn't have intervention. This heightens his chance of being independent, functioning, and contributing

With his hair freshly spiked and his Alabama football shirt pressed, Kal Le Denney is ready for wherever the day's going to take him.

**INTERVENTION IS KEY.
HE WOULDN'T BE THIS
FAR AHEAD IF WE DIDN'T
HAVE INTERVENTION.**



Kal's parents, Robert and Jennifer, are proud of Kal's ingenuity and drive.

to society.” Jennifer is an active member of the Chattahoochee Valley Autism Study, a collaboration between Autism Hope Center, DBHDD and many individuals and agencies in the community. She says there are an estimated 3,000 people living with autism in the Columbus metro area. Jennifer also speaks about the importance of access to cannabis oil as a viable medical alternative. Although it has been approved for use, it is currently not legal to manufacture or transport cannabis across state lines, rendering it impossible to obtain legally. Cannabis is, therefore, not currently an option for the Le Denneys because they don’t want to break the law, especially given Robert’s job as a law enforcement officer. Still, for both Kael and Jennifer, not having to take so many strong medications with side effects would be ideal. Robert talks about how proud he is of his son: “He’s come a long way from the beginning. He’s super smart. He’s all self-taught. He’s an amazing kid.”

Having tired himself out from the morning’s foray around the house, Kael gets out his world map and lays down on top of it. His parents quiz him about places in the world. With the love and admiration of his parents, the drive to learn he already has proven, and hopefully ongoing and increased support from the community, this kid is definitely going places.

Telling Our Stories paints a picture of the complex systems of support that enable people with developmental disabilities to live their best lives. Spanning Georgia’s 56 state senate districts, these stories feature at least one individual who resides in each district – allowing this project to become a vehicle of advocacy for Georgians living with disabilities.

What’s on Tap for the Storytelling Project for 2021 & Beyond

On the Screen As reported in our [recent e-newsletter](#), the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) has partnered with L’Arche Atlanta to bring the stories and voices of Georgians with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families to light with the multi-phase [Storytelling Project](#).

The documentary segment of that project, “[6,000 Waiting](#)”, premiered in January to rave reviews and continues to be screened virtually. Sangha Unity Network,



The Jessamine Place, the Jewish Abilities Alliance and other groups have presented the film to their constituents and received glowing reviews. Shirley Brooks, executive director of the Jessamine Place remarked, “I was very proud of our screening this morning. The film is a wonderful motivator to get people to advocate to unlock the waiting list.”

On the national level, we are excited that the film will also be screened for the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) on April 28 and all DD councils across the country will be invited to participate. To request information on hosting a screening of the film, for a complete list of upcoming screenings and more information on the film, visit the website at www.6000waiting.com.

On the Road On February 25, the storytelling team kicked off the next initiative on the ongoing project. [Treasure Maps: The Georgia Storytelling Roadshow](#) will offer a traveling drive-in theatre featuring a documentary



in which ten Georgians with developmental disabilities share their stories. Treasure Maps will provide an up-close and personal viewpoint into what it is like navigating the complex webs of life in our communities as a person with a developmental disability.

Shannon Turner, who is a professional storyteller and the host of the first season of the projects’ [Hidden Voices](#) podcast, led 43 participants through an information session on how they could become one of the ten stars of the film. “The primary objective of this project,” said Turner, “is to provide a virtual stage for the important stories of people with developmental disabilities, inviting their stories in from the margins to the center of our communities. But an equally important component is to provide education and advocacy to the general population and legislators around the Medicaid waiver, a vital funding structure which supports the lives of people with developmental disabilities so they can live independently.”

The ten film subjects were selected from a pool of applicants and announced in March. They will participate in story development and public speaking training and have their story performances filmed. The roadshow will tour six cities across the state of Georgia – Atlanta, Dahlonega, Augusta, Savannah, Macon and Albany – in late June and early July. Learn more about the project on our [Treasure Maps](#) webpage.



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

APRIL

Ongoing until May 26
**Gwinnett County 2021
Virtual Transition Fair**
[Access the webpage here](#)

April 17-23, 2 hr online course

**WAZE to Adulthood:
Parent Training**

Presented by PEATC with
Parent to Parent of Georgia
[Register FREE online](#)

April 17-23, 2 hr online course

**WAZE to Adulthood:
Professional Training**

Presented by PEATC with
Parent to Parent of Georgia
[Register FREE online](#)

April 20, 2 - 3:30 PM

**Advancing Employment
Webinar: Thinking and
Acting with Fidelity to Best
Practices**

[Register FREE online](#)

April 27, 2 - 3:30 PM

**Advancing Employment
Webinar: The Transition to
CE Integrated Day Support**
[Register FREE online](#)

To find out about
more events across
the state, [visit GCDD's
Calendar of Events.](#)



MAY

May 13, 7 - 8 PM
**Lekotek's Virtual Parent
Support Group**

[Email lekotek.georgia@gmail.com](mailto:lekotek.georgia@gmail.com)
[to register for Zoom link](#)

May 17-23, 2 hr online course

**WAZE to Adulthood:
Parent Training**

Presented by PEATC with
Parent to Parent of Georgia
[Register FREE online](#)

May 17-23, 2 hr online course

**WAZE to Adulthood:
Professional Training**

Presented by PEATC with
Parent to Parent of Georgia
[Register FREE online](#)

JUNE

June 7-11, 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM

**Kennesaw State Academy
for Inclusive Learning and
Social Growth 2021 Summer
Leadership Intensive**

[Download pdf here](#)

June 14-18, 8 AM - Noon

**Kennesaw State Academy for
Inclusive Learning and Social
Growth 2021 Middle School
Summer L.E.A.P. Program**

[Download pdf here](#)

June 21-25, 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM

**Kennesaw State Academy
for Inclusive Learning and
Social Growth 2021 Summer
Leadership Intensive**

[Download pdf here](#)

JULY

July 15-16

**GCDD Quarterly Council
Meeting - Atlanta, GA**

[Find more information online](#)

July 16, 3 - 7 PM

**2nd Annual Disability
Resource Fair**

[Register for FREE tickets online](#)

July 19-23, 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM

**Kennesaw State Academy
for Inclusive Learning and
Social Growth 2021 Summer
Leadership Intensive**

[Download pdf here](#)



CONGRATULATIONS, WESLEY FORD!

GCDD Council Member Wesley Ford
has been selected to be a 2021-2022
National Council of Self Advocates
Officer for The Arc of the United States.