

Making **a** Difference

SPRING 2007

Shockley Joins Disability Day

Successful
Transition Planning

Legislative Update



www.gcdd.org



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**A quarterly magazine of the
Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities**

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities collaborates with Georgia's citizens, public and private advocacy organizations and policymakers to positively influence public policies that enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

GCDD provides this through education and advocacy activities, program implementation, funding and public policy analysis and research.

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To Georgia's Disability Community,

First, I would like to congratulate the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) for completing a new five-year strategic plan to help guide the disability community over the next few years. All of us should be proud of our continuing efforts to create Real Careers, Real Homes, Real Learning Experiences, Real Supports and Real Influence for individuals with developmental disabilities and the record-setting turnout for Disability Day at the Capitol this year.

We all share the common goal of creating an environment in Georgia in which people with disabilities are able to achieve their full potential and contribute to their own communities. I have recommended adding 500 new waivers to expand services to the disability community this year using new resources appropriated by the legislature in the 2008 budget.

The State of Georgia is proceeding with plans to provide new waivers supporting self-determination in July as we continue moving more people from institutions into their communities. An important part of this is helping teenagers with developmental disabilities transition from school into adulthood by providing quality, community-based support services to help them achieve their lifelong goals of a career and independent living.

The State of Georgia has continued to focus on creating additional waivers to fund community support services for people with disabilities. Over the past five years, progress in this area has been significant, and the State hopes to continue addressing the waiting list with a concerted multi-year effort in the years to come. We have worked together to improve public policy, provide more information and enhance funding to better serve the disability community by creating more community-based capacity in the system. My first priority is to assure that we continue to work together in identifying and solving the challenges of the future facing our disability community as we build a better Georgia.



Sonny Perdue
Governor



Together, Communities Can Solve Transition Problems

To paraphrase the Reverend Jim Lawson concerning the “beloved community,” it is a place where there are no barriers between members of the community, and everyone works to solve even the most difficult problems.

For children with developmental disabilities and their parents, it often takes the “beloved community” to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. I have never heard a mom or dad say that the goal for their child is to go to school for 15 years, graduate, come home and sit in front of the television for the next few years. Yet this is what happens for many students with disabilities. Each year over 700 children with disabilities graduate from Georgia’s schools, and unless the parents, school system, the adult service system and the other parts of the community are working together, many of these children find themselves without a job or a plan to gain additional education.

Because it is such a difficult time and process for students and families, we have devoted this edition of *Making a Difference* magazine to the issue of transition. For the past few years,

GCDD has been working with the Departments of Education, Labor and Human Resources, as well as local school systems, parents and students to improve the transition process. GCDD and the Transition Steering Committee believes that:

- Transition must be an interagency process, involving all agencies, systems and individuals in the community who can assist a student with a disability to be successful in the community.
- Transition planning must be student and family-driven. Students are active participants and self-advocates throughout the transition process.
- Transition planning will prepare students for the transition from school to work and beyond by providing information, counseling, support and experiences throughout the transition process.
- Transition planning strives to develop continuity and stability of services and supports throughout the person’s life.

In this edition, we are highlighting those efforts that encompass these values for children as they leave the school system and enter adult life. We hope that their dreams for the future can reach far beyond the living room of their parents’ home or their own home. These dreams should include additional education and/or a career that results in adults being productive members of their community. One example of helping students achieve their dreams is through the Hall County School System, which developed Partnerships for Success. This program brings together students with and without disabilities to create friendships and prepare for what happens after school.

For transition to be really successful, it will require the collaboration and cooperation of the Departments of Education, Labor, Human Resources and Community Health to make sure that students continue to receive supports and have assistance in whatever path they choose once high school is completed. It means that Special Education diplomas have to mean something so that students can go to college or technical schools. It means that vocational rehabilitation counselors have to help students find



“For children with developmental disabilities and their parents, it often takes the ‘beloved community’ to make the transition from childhood to adulthood.”

meaningful jobs and prepare for careers. It means that Medicaid waivers have to be available to help pay for supports both on the job and at home. It means that all the members of a student’s community need to come together and find the solutions to even the most difficult problems. We hope this edition of *Making a Difference* will be part of the solution to those problems.

We want to hear from you. Let us know about your experiences with transition from school. You can reach me at 1-888-275-4233 or you can e-mail me at eejacobson@dhr.state.ga.us.

Eric E. Jacobson

Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD



Letters to the Editor

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

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GOVERNOR'S
COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

"We shut down Washington Street. That's power. With power comes responsibility."

- President Anil Lewis, National Federation of the Blind



"He [Atlanta Falcons Quarterback DJ Shockley] is a phenomenal big brother for two boys with developmental disabilities."

PRESIDENT GAIL HEYMAN,
FRAGILE X ASSOCIATION OF GEORGIA



DISABILITY DAY 2007



Fourteen Advocates Graduate from Georgia Voices that Count

On the eve of Disability Day at the Capitol, a crowd of family members, friends, supporters and representatives of disability rights organizations gathered to celebrate the graduation of the most recent class of Georgia Voices that Count:

Ann Boriskie, Alpharetta • Percy Hardy, Atlanta
• Wendi Harkins, Summerville • Sheila Jeffrey,
Milledgeville • Carrie Lee, Savannah • Peter
McClendon, Stone Mountain • Sharon McDaniel, Hiram
• William Mintz, Athens • Laurel Nalley, Carrollton •
Shannon Steedley, Jonesboro • Jennifer Stewart-Page,
Atlanta • Mario Valentine, Morrow • Velda
Westmoreland, Jonesboro • Rhonda Willis, Atlanta

Class member Willie Borders' extensive hospitalizations prevented him from completing all the aspects of the training and support project, but he was recognized for his advocacy spirit. Lisa Coby, who first joined the group as a supporter and then became a person with a disability and an advocate, was also given an honorary award.

Since the first meeting of the group, 10 months previously, the Georgia Voices that Count participants experienced a variety of activities, discussions and presentations. Students also performed advocacy projects that helped them become the best advocates they could be for themselves and for the disability community.

In April 2006, the group visited the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site which led to a great discussion

about leadership, commitment and the connection between civil and disability rights. In October 2006, the participants and their supporters visited Roosevelt's Little White House in Warm Springs, which developed into discussions about hiding disabilities or feeling pride, as well as employment and Social Security.

The recent graduates increased the number of people with disabilities who have completed the Georgia Voices that Count training and support project to a total of 70. Each participant is given support, training, ideas, contacts, resources and information to strengthen their disability rights advocacy and become even more active in identifying the issues that are detrimental to people with disabilities and being part of the solution.

The graduates and their supporters were very active in Disability Day at the Capitol with their positive energy, signs, chants and the messages they delivered to their legislators.

The selection for the next Georgia Voices that Count class (#6) is completed and soon more active and passionate advocates will learn how to use their power to help change the lives of people with disabilities – working towards "Real Homes, Real Careers, Real Learning, Real Influence and Real Supports."

**"Coming together is a beginning;
 Keeping together is progress;
 Working together is success!" Anon.**

For more information contact Linda Pogue, Georgia Voices that Count project manager, at the disABILITY LINK office at 404-687-8890 x114 or GreenPogue@aol.com or www.disabilitylink.org.

CLARIFICATION

In the Winter 2007 edition of *Making a Difference*, 9to5 Atlanta, Working Women, Inc. was incompletely identified as 9 to 5 Atlanta.



GCDD Welcomes New Members

Eight new members have joined the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities to share their experience and perspective on disability issues.

Jamie Cahill

is a self-advocate who has multiple sclerosis and uses a wheelchair. The Alpharetta resident is a graduate of the University of Alabama and serves as an English as a second language teacher and SAT essay scorer.

Cahill serves on former U.S. Speaker of the House of Representatives Newt Gingrich's Advisory Panel for Disabilities.

Cahill has a special interest in changing rules that limit how people with disabilities work and how much money they can make while receiving Medicaid. She has two daughters and two granddaughters and lives with her dog, Kappa.



Brian Dowd

began working with the Department of Human Resources in 1997. He began his career as a Medicaid case worker for the elderly and people with

disabilities and visual impairments in DeKalb County. Dowd has held several positions with the Division of Family and Children Services throughout the years, including county trainer and Medicaid supervisor for the elderly and people with disabilities and visual impairments. After coming to the state

office in October 2005 as a Medicaid Policy writer, he was appointed Medicaid Unit Manager for DFCS in September 2006.

Dowd has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology from Georgia State University and serves on the Real Supports Committee. Dowd offers an established wealth of knowledge regarding people with disabilities.

Renee Feldman is a veteran educational consultant and parent advocate with over 25 years experience



serving children, teens and adults with varying special needs, and providing training for professionals. A Boston University graduate, she has served as a parent mentor for Clarke County School District for the past five years.

Feldman has worked with the New York City Department of Welfare, and served as a third grade teacher, private tutor, and job coach. Feldman specializes in developing effective student-specific education plans for students of differing abilities with a focus on transition planning beginning in elementary school. She is a member on the East Central Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Disease Region Two Planning Board and the Emory Autism Center Advisory Board. She also serves on the board of the Northeast Georgia Chapter of the Autism Society of America, where she was president. Feldman is married and the proud parent of two wonderful children, - a daughter and an adult son who has autism.

Allan Goldman, MPH,

is the assistant to the director of the Georgia Division of Aging Services and will bring experience in long-term care and other issues of aging. A graduate of the City College of New York City and the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, Goldman is the co-director of the Division's Aging and Disability Resource Connection; the liaison to the disability community, Division of Public Health, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases and the Centers for Disease Control.

Goldman is an experienced legislative advocate, and has served as adjunct associate professor at Emory University, chair of the Association of Schools of Public Health's Aging Council, and as a senior health systems analyst. He also worked in Korea to help curtail the spread of leprosy and with the Peace Corps to control tuberculosis. He has won many awards from a variety of organizations, including the Georgia Gerontology Society, the Arthritis Foundation and the Alzheimer's Association.

Kathleen Kinsella is a senior planner and health policy analyst for the Department of Human Resources' Division of Public Health. A graduate of the University of Hawaii, with a master's in sociology, Kinsella has had a wide variety of experience working with children with disabilities. She has conducted child welfare research with James Bell Associates and served as a substitute special education teacher.

Kinsella has worked extensively in social services research with the American Public Human Services Association, Community Services Planning Council and Office of Hawaiian Affairs. She has written a variety of research publications,



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FALCONS QB DJ SHOCKLEY

Joins Disability Advocates To Raise Awareness



DJ Shockley poses with a fan.

Atlanta Falcons quarterback and former University of Georgia SEC Champion, DJ Shockley joined 1,800 advocates at Georgia's Capitol for the disability community's "Make It Real" rally on February 22.

"Days like today show me the opportunities. They [brothers Xavier and Nicholas who have Fragile X Syndrome] can have their own house and their own way of life, without being completely dependent on me or my parents," said the Falcon. "A lot can be done with good family support and through support of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities as it continues to push for positive change that allows people with disabilities to participate fully as contributing members of society."

Organized by GCDD, the 9th annual Disability Day was by far the largest, causing city officials to block traffic on Washington Street. In the past, the advocates have rallied inside the Capitol building, but this year, the swelling crowd chanted in the streets, waving colorful signs that proclaimed "Money Follows the Person," "Real Careers" and "Make it Real," as disability rights music blasted from a nearby PA system.

"Why are we outside? We're getting bigger and bigger. They told us, 'You have become the biggest crowd during the legislative session,'" said GCDD Executive Director Eric Jacobson, who was joined by council members Tom Seegmueller, Vallorie Butler, Scott Crain, Lynnette Bragg, Denny Spear, Bruce Lindemann, Licheng Tian, Dawn Alford, Meg Nichols, David Cowan, Steve Hall and Tom Connelly and the crowd in a chant of "Real Life! Make it Real!"

The red-shirt-laden crowd was encouraged to speak to their legislators about the need for real support, so people with disabilities can live in the

community instead of nursing homes.

"Today is an opportunity for you to meet with your elected official and have real influence on your leaders," said Tom Seegmueller, GCDD chair. "Together, we become a vocal majority instead of a silent minority."

Real Influence

GCDD Deputy Director Patricia Nobbie, Ph.D., gave the crowd a rundown on legislation they could ask their elected officials to support, including S.B. 13, dealing with the minimum wage; H.B. 24 that provides for an advance directive for health care which combines provisions of a living will and a durable power of attorney for health care; H.B. 279 on Katie Beckett waiver eligibility for kids with spina bifida; H.B. 324, better known as the Children's Health Insurance Act; H.B. 366, a law which would provide higher accessibility for guide dog trainers; and S.B. 10, which would open many doorways to "real learning" for people with disabilities, among several others.



Sen. Eric Johnson, Eric Jacobson and Mark Johnson

"We think parents ought to have a choice."

"We think parents ought to have a choice," said Sen. Eric Johnson (R-Savannah), referring to the choice between public and private schooling for children with disabilities.

Money Follows
the Person
Real Careers
Make it Real



Pat Nobbie, Rep. Judy Manning, Valerie Suber and Dave Blanchard

Dave Blanchard, Atlanta Association on Developmental Disabilities director of public policy, also discussed one of the disability community's most well known requests from legislators – services for thousands of people on waiting lists.

“We’ve had three years of amazing progress. I remember when we were thinking about how to tell you they only funded 10 slots. Then they funded 925 Mental Retardation Waiver Program waivers two years ago and 1,500 last year, (as well as 152 Independent Care Waiver Program waivers last year),” Blanchard said. “But you all know that work is not done. That is not enough! There are so many Georgians whose voices have not been heard. You have been educating legislators...you need to continue to do that.”

“There are so many Georgians whose voices have not been heard.”

Rep. Judy Manning (R-Marietta) agreed, urging the crowd to continue asking legislators for support. “I am so proud that you have done so much to Unlock the Waiting Lists! for thousands of people in Georgia,” she said. “Come back next year! Let’s unlock!”

Lockheed Launches Disability Outreach

Disability Day 2007 was a great success, and it couldn’t have been funded without the help of sponsors who care. Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company was new on the scene this year.

“We want talent wherever it exists, despite any known or unknown limitation,” said Dorie Tuggle, Senior Manager of Equal Opportunities at Lockheed. “There’s a big market out there that many people don’t know about.”

The Marietta Lockheed site alone employs 7,000 people, and welcomes and encourages diversity, providing employees with scooters and enhanced computer monitors. They also offer employees flextime schedules so they can receive medical care when they need it.

“We’re thrilled that Lockheed has partnered with the Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities to find more ways they can expand their opportunities for people with disabilities,” said Valerie Meadows Suber, GCDD public information director and editor-in-chief of *Making a Difference* magazine.



Lockheed’s Ronald Crear, Sr. and Kristen Madison helped sponsor Disability Day.

“we want TO LEARN MORE about how to make facilities **★MORE★ ACCESSIBLE** and enhance the work place.”

KRISTEN MADISON, ESQ., LOCKHEED

07 thank you

A big thank you to all of Disability Day’s major sponsors for making a real difference!

- Atlanta Alliance on Developmental Disabilities • Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission • Georgia Advocacy Office • Georgia Department of Labor • Lockheed Martin Aeronautics Company • State ADA Coordinator • Southern Company • The Marcus Institute

Kate Gainer Named 2007 Self-Advocate of the Year

Kate Gainer, advocacy director at the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, was named the 2007 Georgia Self-Advocate of the Year at Disability Day this February.

"She trains adults with disabilities on how to be a strong advocate... she has persuaded individuals in Georgia and Washington to follow Olmstead," said Beth Tumlin, presenter of the award. "Leadership like this deserves recognition."

The Olmstead decision was a 1999 Supreme Court decision that stated people with disabilities have the right to live in the community and not in segregated settings, such as institutions and nursing homes.

"I am honored by this award, and naturally I think I don't deserve it because the work I do is the reward," she said.

A vocal advocate since the 1950s, Gainer has fought for her rights as both an African American and a person with a developmental disability. She explained that her parents taught her to believe in the American dream and to be a productive member of society at a very young age.

Gainer has served many disability rights organizations over the years, including disABILITY LINK and City Cares, as well as serving as disability affairs coordinator in the Mayor's Office for the City of Atlanta. She has been an instrumental leader in the Long Road Home march and caravan, which brings attention to freeing adults and children with disabilities from nursing homes and institutions.

"The money that comes from this award will go to Long Road Home," Gainer announced.

Georgia's Self Advocate of the Year award was created by Bill and Beth Tumlin in honor of their daughter and self-advocate, Natalie Tumlin, who passed away in October of 2005. A woman with cerebral palsy, Tumlin made countless contributions to the disability community. In 1998, she helped organize the first Disability Day at the Capitol, where 100 advocates kicked off the "Unlock the Waiting Lists!" campaign. In her lifetime, she also met with three governors – Govs. Zell Miller, Roy Barnes and Sonny Perdue – to inform them about the need for community-based services for people with disabilities.



"I am honored by this award, and naturally I think I don't deserve it because the work I do is the reward."

Real Careers

Michael Morris, executive director of the National Disability Institute, spoke of the impact people with disabilities have on the community, and how they deserve a chance to work in this country like everyone else.

"You should have the American Dream and deserve all the freedoms people in this country deserve," he said. "We don't want a hand out. We want a hand up."

"We don't want a hand out. We want a hand up."

The idea was seconded by Rev. Samuel Mitchell, ADAPT president. "We're not an abstract idea. We're asking for jobs!" he proclaimed.

Pleading for full integration of people with disabilities into the community, Nilda Acevedo, a parent advocate from Augusta, then led the crowd in a Spanish chant, "Si se puede! Yes it works!"

"All people have the right to participate and be a part of their community, no matter the amount of their disabilities," she said. "Si tu quieres, tu puedes. Where there's a will, there's a way."

Real Support

Acevedo's speech resonated with Pat Campbell of Marietta, a first-time Disability Day participant who was asking politicians to support legislation that helps high school graduates with disabilities integrate into the community.

"I'm trying to get legislators to fund getting kids into the community. It's hard getting Medicaid to pay for therapy," she explained.

Her concerns were echoed by other parents and people with disabilities in the crowd, including



Rep. Allen Freeman visits constituents.

Advocates asked for real supports.

Holly Stutz from Adrian, Ga.

Her nine-month-old daughter has hypoplastic heart syndrome, which makes going into public places a germ-infested nightmare due to her weak immune system.

"We're trying to get awareness that Medicaid is not paying for Home Health Physical Therapy. This is a problem because my child can't go to a facility because her immune system is down," Stutz said.

For example, Medicaid won't cover her daughter's swallow study, which would help her be able to drink, because it is not considered acute care. It turns out that instead, Medicaid would require the couple to bring their daughter to a hospital for the treatment, which in the end, is more expensive than treating her at home, and more dangerous to her health.

Susan Berch of Atlanta, a self-advocate and Partners in Policymaking graduate, attended Disability Day in support of much of the legislation and to make people aware of the disability community's needs.

"I want people to know we're like everybody else. Everyone's got a weakness."

"I want people to know we're like everybody else. Everyone's got a weakness," the Disability Day veteran explained.



Your Legislators

Legislators are elected to represent Georgia citizens during the law making process. They are often paid low wages and work long hours to ensure those they represent are heard.

"Why am I doing this? Every time I see I can make life better for a person with a disability, it makes it worth it," said Rep. Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta). "I am going to keep doing this."

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities gratefully acknowledges those legislators who attended the rally or visited with constituents at breakfast or lunch at the Freight Depot.

Disability Day participants spotted the following legislators at Disability Day this year, including:

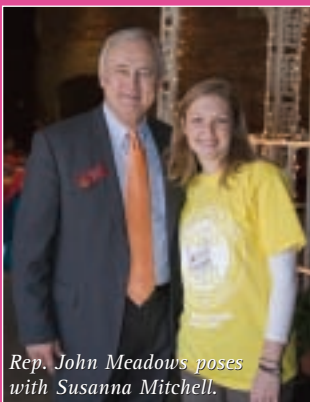
REPRESENTATIVES

- Jon Burns (R-Newington)
- Mark Butler (R-Carrollton)
- Earl (Buddy) Carter (R-Pooler)
- Doug Collins (R-Gainesville)
- Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta)
- Allen Freeman (R-Macon)
- Mike Glanton (D-Clayton)
- Mark Hatfield (R-Waycross)
- Celeste Johnson (D-Clayton)
- Judy Manning (R-Marietta)
- Rep Doug McKillip (D-Athens)
- John Meadows (R-Calhoun)
- Fran Millar (R-Dunwoody)
- Robert Mumford (R-Conyers)
- Jimmy Pruett (R-Eastman)
- Carl Rogers (R-Gainesville)
- Ed Setzler (R-Acworth)
- Ron Stephens (R-Garden City)
- Steve Tumlin (R-Marietta)

DISABILITY DAY 2007

SENATORS

- David Adelman (D-Decatur)
- Gail Davenport (D-Jonesboro)
- Vincent Fort (D-Atlanta)
- Lee Hawkins (R-Gainesville)
- Jack Hill (R-Reidsville)
- Eric Johnson (R-Savannah)
- Ronald Ramsey (D-Lithonia)
- Senator Renee Unterman (R-Buford)
- Tommie Williams (R-Lyons)



Rep. John Meadows poses with Susanna Mitchell.



Sen. Lee Hawkins greets Scott Crain and another advocate.



Rep. Celeste Johnson and Rep. Mike Glanton visited from Clayton County.

Meet Rep. Doug Collins

Representative Doug Collins (R-Gainesville), a newcomer to the Georgia Assembly this session, serves on the Children and Youth and Health and Human Services committees. Collins is the father of Jordan Collins, a teenager with spina bifida. Collins recently spoke with *Making a Difference* magazine about what his daughter and her disability have taught him. Rep. Collins' answers were abridged for publication.



Rep. Doug Collins talks with Hall County students.

1 Tell me about your daughter.

Jordan is 14, and the oldest of three kids. Jordan has spina bifida and can't walk. She likes to do everything that a normal 14-year-old does. She enjoys shopping. She loves to go to basketball and football games. She was in chorus in middle school. She was a cheerleader. She loves to swim. We've tried to keep her involved in everything.

2 In what ways has your family adapted life to Jordan's disability?

At first, people stared at her, and that's hard to get used to. But we talk and we laugh and we hold hands. When we shop, we have to find an elevator. We have hardwood in the house and cement around the pool so she can roll around. We have a pool for her to exercise in.

3 How does your knowledge of life with a disability affect you as a legislator?

It gives me a platform to discuss things and provide expertise, whether it is health care or disability needs. I look at things differently now. For me, stepping up on a curb is no big deal, for my daughter, it's a mountain. When we talk about the school system, I can speak as one who has been there.

4 What advice would you share with a new parent of a child with a developmental disability?

Ours is a growth process. We grow with the child. We all learn at the same time.

The stress is enormous. Lisa and I think the worst mistake a parent of a special needs child can do is to think you're the lone ranger and that no one cares. Know you're not alone. Look at the parents and kids who have made it and find a mentor. Others have adapted, and they're willing to help in every way they can.

All in all, officials from GCDD felt the day was a success.

"The primary goal was to be as visible as possible to the community," said Susanna Mitchell, GCDD program associate, and coordinator of the event.

More than 70 students without disabilities served as volunteers at the rally and plan to do it again next year.

Fifteen students from The Epstein School in Sandy Springs volunteered to assist advocates with visual impairments at the rally. The students had been previously selected for a special certification, and received Orientation and Mobility Training, conducted by The Center for the Visually Impaired, which included the video, *What to do When You Meet a Blind Person*.



Daniel Schlosberg, Jonathan Freedman, Nicki Stouman, Jamee Wasilewsky, Daniel Cohen

"We are delighted to have young people participate in Disability Day. The youth benefit by receiving valuable exposure to community service, advocacy and a bit of civics all rolled into one experience. And, they find it exciting and fun!" said Valerie Meadows Suber, GCDD public information director and editor-in-chief of *Making A Difference* magazine.

Also, students from Hall and Barrow counties gathered over 300 signatures for a banner that will be converted into a large post card and sent to legislators in an effort to further educate them on disability issues.

In the day's closing remarks, the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia encouraged legislators to help people with disabilities have real lives.

"Take us out of the nursing homes! Give us real support so we can work!" Anil Lewis demanded. "When are we talking about it? Real soon!" ●

**Take us out
OF THE NURSING HOMES!
GIVE US REAL SUPPORT
so we can work!**

2007 General Assembly...

Keeps Going and Going...

This is my sixth legislative session, and by far, the most unusual. April 17th will be Day 37, and after that, only rumors of when they will finish for good. One of the major sticking points is the budget, and the need to replace a deficit in PeachCare funding of \$131,000,000. Congress has proposed to repay the dozen or so states that face deficits in an emergency appropriations bill that also includes Iraq War funding, but pending action on that bill, Georgia has to cover its own. That has resulted in the legislative process proceeding in fits and starts.

So at the time of this review, the session has seven days remaining, and anything can happen in those days. This reports what we know as of Friday, March 29, 2007.

As reported in the January edition of *Making a Difference*, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities agenda-setting process engages a broad constituency of organizations and individuals involved with disability advocacy. Issues of concern are summarized and explained to GCDD members at the October meeting, and separated into five tiers of action: initiate; active support; support by name; remain neutral; and oppose.

Tier I: GCDD Initiates

(these items are also part of GCDD's five-year work plan)

UNLOCK THE WAITING LISTS!: Request is 2,000 Mental Retardation Waiver Program (MRWP) services, \$20.5 million state funding for nine months.

The Governor's budget proposed funding 1,500 services with an appropriation of \$12,241,480, which is a combination of redirected funds within the Department of Human Resources for 170 services and new money. The Unlock the Waiting Lists! campaign will continue to advocate for the funding of 500 additional waiver services to bring the total in line with the recommendation in the multi-year funding plan. The enhancement request includes funds to establish the necessary infrastructure to support individuals in the community such as support coordination, intake and evaluation, person-centered planning, employment initiatives, behavioral and nursing services and medications.

MONEY FOLLOWS PERSON: In the grant submitted under the Deficit Reduction Act, Georgia plans to move 650 individuals with developmental disabilities from state hospitals over the next three years. Georgia was not funded in the first round; we have not received word on the second round of funding from the federal government.

MEDICAID BUY-IN: Information assembled as a result of the budget directive from last session has been shared with Senate committee leadership. There has been no commitment on funding at this time. A buy-in would enable individuals with disabilities to seek and maintain competitive employment and salaries without jeopardizing their health benefits through sharing the cost of their Medicaid coverage. The estimated cost in the Department of Community Health budget ranges

The Unlock the Waiting Lists! campaign will continue to advocate for the funding of 500 additional waiver services to bring the total in line with the recommendation in the multi-year funding plan.

Braille Literacy Legislation would require that teachers of the blind be literate in Braille.

HB 652 sponsored by Manning and Reese was held over to next year.

Guide Dog legislation; allows access to public facilities to trainers of service dogs equal to that of dogs already in service with people with disabilities.

HB 366, sponsored by Tim Beardon, passed the House, but received "riders" of dog fighting bills in the Senate. Passed Senate on Mar 30, will go back to House since the original version is different

Colored boxes represent GCDD's Tier III Support.



between \$1 million and \$2.8 million depending on the level of unearned income and the number of people to be covered.

CHILDREN'S FREEDOM INITIATIVE: This work has begun, and we want to ensure that the legislature continues to allocate enough funding to move the rest of the children without compromising the budget needed to support adults with developmental disabilities in the community. The proposed allocation for the waiver services includes funds needed to continue to move children, but the additional 500 services Unlock seeks will ensure that community-based services for adults will not be traded off for transitioning the children.

EDUCATION ISSUES: As stated in the January issue, the major areas of concern for GCDD were not anticipated to be acted on in this legislative session. The major education issue being debated this year is SB 10, the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship. SB 10 would enable parents of children who have been in the public school for at least one semester, and who have an Individualized Education Program, to apply for their state-funded Quality Basic Education equivalent (estimated at about \$9,000) to enroll in a registered private school. The bill has been actively debated among parents, professionals and the general education community. It has passed the Senate and will be before the House Education Committee for a vote the second week of April.

ELECTION CODE: HB 1435 which passed last year, made some major improvements to the voting process for people with disabilities. This bill will be worked on for next legislative session.

Tier II: Other organization is the lead, GCDD actively supports

PROVIDER RATES, TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY /SPINAL CORD INJURY FUNDING: Neither of these proposals will be funded this year. Legislators were very cautious about adding any enhancements until the PeachCare issue was resolved. Included in the Unlock package of services is a 9.5% reimbursement increase for support coordination only.

REINTRODUCE E-TEXT LEGISLATION: The proposed legislation would cover students with Print Access Disabilities, who are students on the secondary level at all public and private postsecondary institutions, including tech schools and proprietary schools who must be accommodated under the Americans with Disabilities Act or Rehabilitation Act. A reworked bill may be ready to drop this year, and will wait until next year for further action.

Tier III: GCDD allows use of name, but otherwise no action

GCDD allowed its name to be used as a supporter of the initiatives, listed in the colored boxes, but otherwise took no direct action. Any of these bills that did not pass out of at least one chamber by the 30th day will be held over until next session. If the bill did pass out of at least one chamber, it is still active and could pass both houses by the end of the session.

OTHER LEGISLATION OF NOTE:

- **HB 24:** Georgia Advance Directives for Health Care Act: Passed both House and Senate.
- **HB 279:** Automatic eligibility for Katie Beckett if child has myleomeningicele form of spina bifida. Passed House, referred to Senate Appropriations
- **HB 340:** Restricts eligibility of PeachCare families from 235% of poverty to 200% of poverty, and offers dental and vision only at additional premium. Passed House, now in Senate Rules committee.

Support Georgia Alliance on Direct Support Professionals for DSP Recognition Day at the Capitol

This event will have to be scheduled for next session.

Support the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta in its request for \$575,000 for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities.

This enhancement was not put in the Governor's budget.

Support the Tools for Independence project to establish an assistive technology project in each Center for Independent Living

The State Independent Living Council decided to hold off on this request for this session.



- **HB 540:** Child support past the age of majority, gives judges the discretion to award continuing child support for dependent adults with developmental disabilities if they are unable to support themselves sufficiently. Held over in House Judiciary.
- **HB 549:** Relating to Care Management Organizations, loosens requirements for prior authorizations for children with special needs needing on-going therapies and treatments; passed House, in Senate appropriations.
- **HB 655:** Commission on the Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons. Passed House, in Senate Health and Human Services
- **SR 363:** Creating the Mental Health Service Delivery Commission, in response to the state hospital crisis. Passed Senate.

THE BUDGET: As of submission, the FY 2007 supplemental budget still had not been completed and voted out of both chambers, and the FY 2008 budget was being worked on simultaneously. In addition to the services under Unlock, the following are some additions to the FY 2008 budget:

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: Augment budget for state schools; repairs to buildings, travel for PINES, 5 new instructors at Atlanta School for the Deaf, compensation for training and experience; \$2,200,913

DHR: 500 slots in the Community Care Services Program for elderly clients; \$2,079,800; and 1,000 slots in non-Medicaid eligible elderly clients for Home and Community-Based Supports; \$2,700,000.

Moving Forward will continue to provide updates on the session, so make sure you are on the mailing or e-mail list to receive it. During the summer, advocates will review the legislation held over, and begin making plans for the 2008 session. ●

Support the effort to raise the Georgia minimum wage to \$7.00 per hour, led by the Living Wage Coalition and others.

SB 13 was actively debated, but did not pass out of committee. Held over until next year.

Whatever happened to the \$7.6 million appropriated by the legislature last year to address the needs of the families who lost eligibility under Katie Beckett?

\$5.2 million was allocated to transitional funding which provided Visa debit cards to approximately 1,100 families who responded to the offer. Each card contained \$2,600.00 that families could use in a variety of ways to meet their child's needs. Just a bit over \$1,000,000 was spent on this transitional funding – the remainder will be added to the \$2.4 million allocated to an initiative called Champions for Children with Exceptional Needs. Through careful and deliberate research, outreach and convening, the Initiative will partner with existing nonprofit organizations to provide services, referrals and financial assistance to support families of children with exceptional needs beginning in late 2007 and beyond. The Champions for Children with Exceptional Needs Initiative is being coordinated by The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. The Georgia Health Policy Center is conducting focus groups, community forums and expert interviews to assess the situations of these families. An Advisory Committee is providing consultation, input and perspective on the Champions for Children with Exceptional Needs Initiative. The Advisory Committee has diverse representatives, including nonprofits, higher education, corporations, state government, the medical community and parents of/advocates for medically fragile children.

Support passage of the Time for Schools Act: The legislation would provide job-protected leave for parents to attend meetings or events at their child's school.
Not acted on in this session.

Deaf Blind Legislation: provides for the delivery of employment-related resources to deaf/blind and blind individuals by an organization knowledgeable on deaf/blind issues.
 SB 49: Passed Senate, referred to Health and Human Services in House.

PERSPECTIVES

The Portfolio Process: STIMULATING CONVERSATION Between Students and Parents

By Special Education
Teacher Rosa Evans,
East Hall High School

The purpose of this process is to open students' and parents' eyes to what the student is currently doing and what they want for themselves in the future.

The students make a portfolio with the teacher at school. The classroom teacher helps the students dream and focus on what they want out of life. An informational meeting is held in the evening to explain this process to the parents. The parents are asked to take home a blank portfolio and complete it from their perspective for their student, without the help of the student. The students like the idea of creating something to share with the parents as a surprise. The parents were excited to have the opportunity to communicate with their children in a new and different way. The focus is on the student and their dreams. The comparison comes together at a dinner for the families. The student opens the floor for discussion as the members of the small groups begin to share the different things that the portfolio reveals to each other.

As the classroom teacher, I feel that this is a wonderful way to get parents and students to begin communicating about transitioning into the real world. The success comes when they meet in the middle as Quinshun and his mother did. The process made their relationship stronger and more open to dream than it had ever been. Goals are important to future planning for the students and the parents.

Focusing on Sports, School Important to Student

By Quinshun Camp

The portfolio process was fun. I did not understand what it was all about at first, but after I learned about it, I really enjoyed it. My favorite part of the portfolio was when I took pictures with my mom and reflected on our relationship with each other.

When I was writing about my typical day, that was the point that made me realize that what my mom thought I wanted was different. Football and basketball are very important to me. The dreams that I had were different from my mom's.

I really want to attend college, play sports and my mom thought I wanted to get a job.

After we went through the process of the portfolio, I realized just how important school was to me. In my portfolio, my dreams were to get out of school, get married and have kids. My mom wanted me to attend technical school and become a far more godly man. This made us both think about the future more. I realized that school was the most important thing in my life at this point. Sports had become a way of life for me, and I had found something that I was good at. So I really want to go to school, play sports at the next level and get an education to help me find a better job.

My mom wants the best for me, and now we are talking more about technical schools that have sports. This process made us realize that we both wanted something different, but that was okay. Now mom and I enjoy talking and dreaming about what we want for both our futures. ●

**"This process made us
realize that we both wanted
something different,
but that was okay."**

Portfolio Project Helps Mother, Son Grow Closer

Making Good Choices Important to Mother

By Deborah Morse

I think the portfolio process was a great way for students to express their feelings about family and friends. This process can also aid in future plans of finding employment and a school that will help provide the services needed in furthering their education.

I would like for this process to be used in other schools to help with special needs kids. This will give them an outlet to show that they have the potential to make an impact on our society. Our children feel down about themselves more than what people realize. As they put their ideas into words or pictures, it brings about exciting results. The kids will believe that they can achieve anything. It builds confidence. Our children have hidden talents that will be seen and read by people in this world. Opening the door in this way for our students will help them go a long way in life.

In different areas of the portfolio, it gives them a chance to say to themselves, "Hey, I have a mind to think on my own..." It shows them different aspects of their day. What are their likes and dislikes? Who can they go to when they are in trouble? What do they accomplish in the community? Why do they love their family? Where can they be the most help? When will the time come to adjust to the normal things in life? There are many questions for them to ask, and as they sit and write them, it gives them a chance to see themselves for who they really are.

As the choices become open, they see that while others are making the choice to go out and do the bad

things, they don't have to. Why not hang out with people that want to have fun? You don't have to do bad things to have fun. My pastors are concerned about the youth of today. No one is willing to take the time and tell them the truth. If you do wrong, you have to pay for it. If you do well, you will also be rewarded for it.

"Our children have hidden talents that will be seen and read by people in this world."

We are taught in the word of God that whatsoever a man sowed, he shall reap. Our children need to sow good things.

I liked the area where they were asked to describe a typical day. It lets them see what they are doing. It is a chance to show them that they can think on their own. Choices are made daily in our life. What do I wear today, or eat? A choice to stay in school and learn and then graduate. Every day parents need to make a positive impact on their children, Encourage them; be there when they need to talk. Communicate with your child. When you do this, it gives them the opportunity to open up and tell you any problems they are facing. While doing this, your child will make the right choice in life. The reason why? You were there to guide them. I want to know that I've done my best in helping my children to make the right choice. ●



QUINSHUN CAMP attends East Hall High School in Hall County. He plays defensive tackle for the football team, basketball and shot-put and discs for track. He plans to attend a technical school and play intramural sports.

DEBORAH MORSE has two boys, Quinshun and Jacquez. She works for Wrigley's and is a member of the Church of Life where she is very active.

Successful Transitions Built Around Individual Strengths

Brandon McKeen has been riding horses since he was four years old. Now 15, the junior at Manchester High School in Meriwether County has a comprehensive transition plan that builds on his love of horses and is tailored to his unique talents.

"Brandon has autism and is not good at communicating with his peers. But he is really good with horses. He has won many horse shows and was a state gold medalist in dressage, showmanship, equitation and trail," his mom, Keri Lara, said.

McKeen is academically gifted, but found the classroom environment to be too stressful, so he is pursuing a dual college preparatory and technical preparatory curriculum via online classes from Georgia Virtual School. In addition, he takes

horse care and management classes through Griffin Technical College at the Pegasus Riding School in Milner, Ga.

Upon graduation in May 2008, at age 16, McKeen will be a certified stable groom, horse trainer and instructor, all employable skills. He also plans to pursue farrier school, which teaches people how to take care of horses' hooves.

"I'd like to care for horses and teach lessons. Teach riding and training lessons assisting in a barn and riding a horse. It's something I can do all by myself," he said

A combination of community support, waivers and a creative special education team has helped McKeen create this special transition plan, according to his mother.

"We've had many IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings, but we started with conversations. Our school system talks about strengths and desires. Asking Brandon to do something with a horse is different than asking him to sit down and be quiet in a classroom where other students' behavior affects him. He spent most of his time at school in his own private room because of anxiety issues. On the farm, he's helping other people with their animals," Lara said.

While the school system helps pay for Brandon's classes at Griffin Tech, the community has pitched in as well, with the Kiwanis club sponsoring him at both Special Olympics and regular horse shows. The therapeutic stable, where he first learned to ride as a four-year-old, gave him a saddle and his horse, Annie. The employees of the local grocery store support his life skills lessons and his church hosted a supper for him to celebrate his success at a horse show.

And Lara has been able to use McKeen's affinity for horses to help teach life skills, such as cleaning up his room. "I just ask him if Annie would want to live in his room," she said.

The two elements that make McKeen's transition plan so successful are that his

Keri Lara and Brandon McKeen are working to assure McKeen has employable skills upon graduation.



I'd like to care for horses and teach lessons. Teach riding and training lessons assisting in a barn and riding a horse. It's something I can do all by myself.

transition team really focuses on his strengths and desires, and that more than just the school system is involved in making him into a successful and independent adult.

A tool developed by Mary Rugg, an early intervention project director at the Institute on Human Development and Disability, is helping students of all ages transition more smoothly into school and new situations.

The Take a Look at Me Portfolio was developed initially to help transition younger children into school, but has also been adapted to helping students who are transitioning from elementary to middle school and those who are transitioning out of school.

"The portfolio really gives the individual an opportunity to share and reflect about their lives and really think through issues about what they enjoy, what they like to make choices about."

"The portfolio really gives the individual an opportunity to share and reflect about their lives and really think through issues about what they enjoy, what they like to make choices about," explained Rugg. "We need to build supports around their strengths and interests, and the portfolio helps identify children's strengths. If you know what a child likes, you can use that to engage them in conversation and interaction."

The tool is also used to help families better understand their children. "From the beginning, families need to understand they do have hopes and dreams for their child. Our role is to help them realize them. The portfolio allows teachers and providers to have a clear understanding of the family's goals," Rugg said.

While the portfolio is used widely for students

State Offers Transition Support

While successful transitions are highly individualized, the state Department of Education's Division of Exceptional Students offers local school systems support through a comprehensive transition manual as well as training and dissemination of best practices.

"We developed some case studies to help local systems and some sample IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) that address transition," explained Director of the Division of Exceptional Students Marlene Bryar.

The transition manual, which can be found on the division's Web site, is frequently updated to reflect changing federal regulations and offer new case studies. The manual also includes timelines, forms, additional resources and suggestions on how to prepare students for post-school outcomes. The manual addresses transitioning at the elementary and middle school ages, as well as transitioning out of school and into adult life.

One new addition to the manual is a Summary of Performance. This new required federal form identifies what accommodations students need to be able to access post-school work or educational environments.

"It summarizes the student's present level of performance and offers recommendations to help students meet post-secondary outcomes," Bryar, a member of the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, said.

Training school systems on how to form effective interagency councils is another top priority at the state. The councils bring together representatives from the Departments of Education, Labor (Vocational Rehabilitation) and Human Resources, as well as local businesses and other area services and companies.

"The councils determine what supports are available in that community and see that students get the services they need to be successful in the post-school environment," Bryar said. "Some of these councils are doing a very good job, and we have them present at different transition conferences to help other communities get stronger."

To help fund the training, the division is applying for a State Personnel Development Grant under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. "With this grant, we can help school systems analyze their needs and what training they need to improve education," Bryar said.

In addition to assisting with transition training, the grant would also address lowering the drop out rate, dealing with behavioral issues, improving reading and math skills and encouraging parental involvement. ●

"The councils determine what supports are available in that community and see that students get the services they need to be successful in the post-school environment."



Auburn Elementary School fifth graders grew closer together as a result of the portfolio process and created a presentation based on what they learned.

with disabilities, it was developed as an inclusive tool, and Terry Adler, a special education teacher at Auburn Elementary School in Barrow County has been using it to help 23 fifth graders with and without disabilities make the transition from elementary to middle school.

"The portfolio talks about the students as people – who is important in their lives, how they interact with their community, who they can go to for help, how to make good and bad choices, what are their favorite things. Every week we did a different theme," Adler said. "We've talked throughout the process about who they are now and how it's going to be next year. We want to make them comfortable in their environment so they have less frustration."

Coupled with visits from current middle schoolers and a tour of the middle school, Adler feels the process has been a great success. "You wouldn't realize the difference between regular and special ed students. Now they are cohesive and work well together. They have learned about differences and how people don't have the same abilities, but that everybody is still special and unique. Everyone is good at something. I'll definitely do it again next year."

Rugg said the key to the portfolio process is what is done with the information after it is collected. "How does it enhance others' understanding of you? It can encourage a dialogue with family, therapists and teachers when you share the information," she said.

Adler's students have been sharing their portfolios with each other and will present them to

"They have learned about differences and how people don't have the same abilities, but that everybody is still special and unique."



their parents at a celebration. The portfolios may then also be used to help their new middle school teachers reach a better understanding of them when they begin sixth grade next year.

"Service providers tend to focus on supports, not what the person really likes and what's important to them. If we use the tool appropriately, we can open doors and make connections for people," Rugg said.

Some North Hall High School students in Hall County have found the portfolio process to be beneficial in opening lines of communication with their parents and discovering what they want to do with their lives.

"I found out I'm a nice guy and made up my mind about being a welder," revealed Ryan Sexton, a senior.

Graham Meers, a sophomore, also completed a portfolio. "It helped me think about how to reach my goals. I want to be a football manager."

After setting his goal, Meers, who is co-vice president of his school's Partners Club, an organization that brings students with and without disabilities together for social and community service activities, is getting advice from some of the athletes in the club on how to reach that goal.

Cindy Saylor and Colleen Lambert, program coordinators for the Partnerships for Success grant, which is funded by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, encouraged the officers of the North Hall Partners Club to complete the portfolio process.

"Our hope is that they will see they share similar interests when they share their portfolios,"

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"If we use the tool appropriately, we can open doors and make connections for people."



Partners Club Helps Students Connect with Community

By Valerie Smith Buxton

A successful transition from high school to adult life requires a network of community support, and one Georgia school system has been extremely successful in helping its students with disabilities form those community connections through its innovative Partners Club programs.

Each of Hall County's high schools has a Partners Club, which gives students with and without disabilities an opportunity to socialize and do community service projects together. And each club continues to grow as other students see the members having fun and interacting with each other.

"Partners Club is open to everybody in the school. The club helps transition students by decreasing their fear of friendship and increases the network for a person with a disability," explained Colleen Lambert, program coordinator for Hall County Schools.

Cindy Saylor, who is also a program coordinator for Hall County Schools, added, "Historically, students with disabilities have been excluded from clubs and typical high school life. Partners Club is about inclusion in school that carries over into the community. These students are future leaders in our community. They are going to be around people with disabilities and more willing to hire people with disabilities later on."

The clubs are run by co-officers; each position has a student with and without a disability in it that helps make decisions about club activities.

Ryan Sexton, a senior at North Hall High School, is co-president of his Partners Club. "I help conduct meetings and make announcements. I'm more outgoing than I used to be," he revealed.

The club is one of the largest at North Hall, with more than 100 members. Sexton and Graham Meers, the co-vice president, were instrumental in recruiting new members, according to Colleen Pirkle, the club's faculty adviser.

The club sponsors various activities, such as going to dinners, learning about different topics and bowling.

"We went to dinner and homecoming together – in a limousine," Meers said enthusiastically.

Pirkle said the club has really helped students with and without disabilities get to know each other and understand each other better. In fact, one student coined the term "enabled" to describe the students with disabilities after becoming friends with them.

"I learned not to judge by appearance.

You have to get to know people and their personalities."

Flowery Branch High School also has a branch of the popular club, with about 80 members. Sisters Lauren and Layne King initially joined because their mother, a special education teacher, was the sponsor. Being part of the club has enriched their lives.

Layne King recently helped a fellow Partners Club member pick out prom dresses for a prom fashion show. "Most people are uncomfortable around people with disabilities, but they're just people," she said.

Her sister agreed. "Everybody has quirks. They can do things I can't even imagine doing," Lauren King said.

Jody Magin, a junior at North Hall, joined to meet new friends. "I wanted to get involved with all different types of people," she said.

Daniel Thornhill and Jordan Raber both joined the Flowery Branch



East Hall High Partners Club members enjoy bowling together.

Partners Club after having a great time helping out with the Special Olympics.

"I learned not to judge by appearance. You have to get to know people and their personalities," Raber said.

"If I can help in any way possible, I'm going to try to make a difference," Thornhill said.

Saylor said the club is having a big impact on students' lives in school. Students with and without disabilities are eating lunch together and playing on unified teams in the Special Olympics. "It's created a very inclusive environment in school," she said.

Magin agreed. "Different students who have joined this club took a very important part. When other kids make fun of enabled kids, they stick up for them. It lets the other students know they have feelings, too," she said.

Saylor hopes to extend the friendships formed in the club beyond school by educating students without disabilities how they can include their friends in other activities, and by educating the families of the students with disabilities how their children can participate.

"Natural friendships are forming, but not carrying over because students don't know how to invite friends to participate in activities outside of club activities," Saylor said. Transportation for a student with a physical disability, for example, can be a barrier.

Saylor also plans to help members keep in touch after high school. "The goal is to set up an alumni association so they can continue to keep in touch with each other after they graduate," she said. ●



ABOVE: Ryan Sexton (L) and Shayne Simpson make signs for a thrift sale.



RIGHT: Partners Club members ride their homecoming float.

Hall and Barrow County Partners Club members met Dr. Stephen Hall, director of the Office of Developmental Disabilities, during Disability Day.



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Saylor said. "It's fun for anyone to see themselves positively, instead of focusing on deficits. It focuses on our abilities and what we CAN do.

"One thing we have done is have the student complete the portfolio at school and the parent complete one at home. Then we have a portfolio party at school, and the parents and students share them," Lambert said.

"The students and parents don't share the portfolios until they come together at the school. They talk about the differences. Sometimes they can be very different. One parent still saw her daughter as a child, but the student saw herself as a young adult," Saylor explained.

When differences in goals exist between the student and the parent, the teacher tries to mediate by opening a dialogue and getting the student and parent going in the same direction. "In one of our meetings, we had a family set goals and list steps to achieve them. During their student's IEP, they'll report what steps they've taken toward their goals," Lambert said.

As part of the process, the portfolio also helps students identify goals and the steps they need to take to reach those goals. One step includes identifying people in the community who might be able to help them accomplish their goals.

"The portfolio can be used to take to a potential employer or service agency in the community to tell more about the student," Lambert said. In fact, some teachers are beginning the portfolio process earlier to help ninth graders set goals. Then throughout the students' high school, they add to the portfolio, including information about jobs they have that may help them attain employment upon graduation.

The process can also be used as a starting point for person-centered planning, which is a process where people in the students' circle of

support get together to help identify ways students can reach their goals."

Rugg said the portfolio is a helpful tool in person-centered planning. "It allows the individual to reflect over time what is really important to them. So people in their circle of support really know about the person they're meeting about."

Saylor and Lambert also believe the portfolio

process is a good way to start teaching students about self-determination. They have set up a program where education students from North Georgia College and State University and Brenau University help teach self determination and work with members of the Partners Club.

Brittany Lee is a junior at North Georgia College and State University and is teaching self-determination to 10 students with disabilities this year in Hall County.

"I teach them how to think about long-term goals for their lives and think about what they want to do after high school so they can find a job that's suited to them," Lee said.

"I teach them how to think about long-term goals for their lives and think about what they want to do after high school so they can find a job that's suited to them."

She says the course helps students focus on issues other than the subjects they are learning about in school. "We're talking about what's important to them. I'm teaching them about how short-term goals can help fulfill long-term goals. I'm getting them to think about five years from now – what they want to be doing and what they need to do to get there," she said.

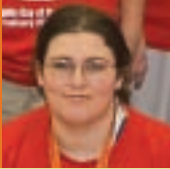
"The most surprising thing to me is they have goals that are just like mine – living on their own, accomplishing different things, learning different things. What they're capable of is amazing. They're able to get out in the community and do things I wouldn't have thought they would be able to do," she said.

With the proper supports in place, all students should be able to transition successfully into adulthood, just as Brandon McKeen is doing. "Find something you love; find a way to be good at it; and, find a way to make money. For Brandon he loves his horses. He wants his own farm where he can board and train horses. His community will be there for him, as well as his family. That's how you make a good transition," Lara said. ●

Dana recently passed away, and her church established the Dana Carlton Sunshine Award for children who exemplify her character traits - joyful, kind, caring and no complaining.



Dana Carlton (L) shared her portfolio with her parents Stacie and Dennis.



Jesus Says: Let the Children Come to Church

By Christy Rosell

In the book of Matthew, Jesus scolded a few disciples who shooed the little ones away, saying, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

Like Jesus, an East Hall High School student named Jesus Riviera was concerned that some children with disabilities in his class were being prevented from worshipping.

"He started getting worried why his special friends at school never came to church, so Francisca, his sister, started inquiring, and found out that some of these children were not even baptized," said Patricia Davalos, parent liaison for Hispanic families and students in the Hall County School System.

"It's because they had disabilities and had never been through the process," added Cindy Saylor, program coordinator for the Hall County school system.

In mainstream American culture, the absence of baptism and participation in Catholic sacraments may not be quite as surprising. However, the altar boy's classmates are Latino, and according to the 2002 U.S. Census, 72.6% of Hispanics

claimed to be Catholic. So, it was shocking to learn that the majority of these children had barely been to church, let alone participated in sacraments such as Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

In response to her brother's concerns, Francisca Riviera discussed the situation with Father Fabio Sotelo of St. Michael Catholic Church in Gainesville.

"We decided to do a mass where they can feel comfortable," Rev. Sotelo explained. "We are building a ministry here for them."

As a result, 30 Hispanic students with disabilities in Hall County were able to partake in their sacraments – 11 took their First Communion, 10 were confirmed, and one was baptized – on December 19, 2006.

"Ese es una semana festiva, una celebración de esperanza," declared the priest. "This is a festive week, a celebration of hope."

After the 200 worshippers in their Sunday best sang "Hosana en el Cielo," "Hosanna in the Highest," there was a celebration in the recreation hall where colorfully decorated cakes declaring spiritual growth were the main attraction.

Jesus Riviera worked the room, greeting fellow students and parents with



Photography by: Corey O'Quinn

Above: Angelica Proaño took her first Communion with 11 of her peers.



Left: Juan Carlos Mejia and Guadalupe were confirmed last December.

Previously, Riviera had participated in Partnerships for Success, a program funded by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities that promotes inclusion for students in Hall County. In an activity called person-centered planning, Jesus gathered with parents, relatives and teachers to plan his future by discussing his strengths – one of which was his social personality.

It was decided that his sister, with whom he lives, would help Jesus find ways to be more involved in his church.

"So he trained to be an altar boy," said Davalos, who was a participant in the planning session.

Since the December service, another service was held at St. Michael in February, where six additional children with disabilities were either baptized, confirmed or took their First Communion.



"This is a festive week, a celebration of hope."

a huge smile, as if he were the host of the party himself.

And actually, his personality was a major reason why these children were finally able to come to church.

For more information about St. Michael's services, please visit www.stmichael.cc or call 770-534-3338. The church offers services in Spanish, English and Vietnamese. ●



Mia Hits a Speed Bump

By Patricia Nobbie, Ph.D., Mia's Mom

Mia has had a set-back. I recall with some embarrassment my statement from the earlier column that Mia was doing as well as we could expect, and I recited with pride her accomplishments. Now I've had a major reality adjustment. I knew she had had some issues falling asleep on the job, and her supervisor was taking her off the clock when that happened, but at home I was struggling to figure out what to do about this. She's a night owl. She can stay up long past my ability to stay awake, and she can even outlast my other two teenagers. She was getting up for work on time, and arriving when she was supposed to, but she had begun falling asleep on the job more and more, and the association couldn't keep up the level of direct supervision that she was requiring to stay on task. So they gave her job coach the bad news and she gave me the bad news and I burst out crying!

Mia's job also meant freedom for me. Freedom from setting up different schedules each day, freedom from worry four hours a day because I knew she was with people who cared about her, she was safe, and enjoying herself, and freedom from economic worry, because her job gave her discretionary income and helped pay for the students who transported her and otherwise spent time with her. Suddenly, I was back to pre-employment shuffling, cobbling together activities and company each day, compelling the other kids to be at home at certain times, etc.

Fortunately, Mia has a waiver, she has supported employment services from Briggs and Associates and she also has the promise of returning to work at the Alumni Association if we can resolve the issues that cause her to sleep during the day. We are lucky that way. But I struggle with the thought that I really need to stay home for a few weeks, get her schedule back on track, establish a diet for her and keep her on it, keep up the exercise program at Curves, get a sleep study done for her apnea, etc.,



etc., etc. Her weight, diet and sleep schedule compose a cycle that I cannot seem to interrupt on my own. I worry about how long it will take to get her re-employable. We know how hard re-employment is because we've heard the stories from families that have worked with Vocational Rehabilitation. Kids get work, and VR closes the case successfully, then they lose their jobs and there is no one to help them figure out what went wrong, how to learn again what they missed or lost and no one to help them become re-employed. Once again, they end up sitting home.

Transition is a recurring process. Mia constantly reminds me, in her own way, that we have never really arrived; we are always traveling. Now that we've had a taste of employment, we need to get back, but we have some big stuff to overcome and figure out, and the longer we are unemployed, the harder it is.

"...Mia had developed a community to help her work, college students and friends, job coaches and family members and co-workers, and it is this community that will help her get back to work."

What has helped is that Mia had developed a community to help her work, college students and friends, job coaches and family members and co-workers, and it is this community that will help her get back to work. Her case is not closed with them. Maybe the most important thing we can do for transitioning teens is help them find, develop and connect with the members of their community to be their companions as they navigate the world. ●

Mia
CONSTANTLY
reminds me,
IN HER OWN WAY,
that we have
never really arrived,
we are always
TRAVELING.

Transition - Key to Better Post-Secondary Options

By Dr. B. Lu Nations-Miller

This is an exciting time in Georgia for transition! The purpose of transition is to assist students with disabilities to build the skills and supports they need to reach their post-school goals. The successful transition from school to post-school should be a priority of everyone who works with students with disabilities in secondary education and beyond, from parents and teachers to any other professional involved.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (1997) was "to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living." The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA changed transition services to a "results-oriented process" that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child." IDEA 2004 requires the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to include "appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living."

"Transition requires support from multiple sources for students and their families to make choices, develop connections and access services."

The transition component of the IEP should be developed at the beginning of the IEP meeting immediately after the student's present level of performance. The proposed state rules for special education require that transition plans be in place prior to the student entering ninth grade or by age 16, whichever comes first. There should be a clear and direct relationship between a student's transition goals and the other IEP goals and objectives. Transition requires support from multiple sources for students and their families to make choices, develop connections and access services. The state model transition plan includes:

- Measurable post-secondary outcome goals
- Preferences, strengths, interests and course of

study based on present levels of performance and age appropriate transition

- Measurable transition IEP goals
- Transition activities and services
- The persons and agencies involved
- The date of completion and achieved outcomes

There are transition initiatives going on in Georgia that will help improve transition services to students with disabilities:

1. The new Georgia Interagency Transition Council Web site will become "live" July 1, 2007. A collaborative effort with the Department of Labor/Vocational Rehabilitation, Tools for Life and the Georgia Department of Education/Division of Exceptional Students, the site will be a one stop shop for information about the what, when, where, how and who of Georgia Interagency Transition Councils.
2. The Division of Exceptional Students is submitting an application for a new five-year State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) that will focus on secondary education with an emphasis on successful school completion for students with disabilities. Goals include: improved reading and math achievement; decreased number of dropouts; reduced discipline problems; increased parent engagement and support; and, increased recruitment of certified special education teachers. The SPDG will also partner with the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities to work with cohorts of middle and high schools to facilitate a strategic planning and implementation process.
3. The revised Georgia Transition Manual (found on the Georgia Department of Education Web site) will be available in August, 2007. It will include updates from IDEA 2004 and the changes to transition as well as updates on new Web sites and other resources that have become available.
4. The Transition CD based on the Athens/Pre-conference Touch the Future Transition Training will be available in the near future. ●



Dr. B. Lu Nations-Miller provides technical assistance to school systems and other state agencies in developing and delivering transition services and activities to students with disabilities and their families. She previously worked in related vocational instruction and as a special education coordinator. A graduate of Georgia State University, she has received numerous awards, including Vocational Teacher of the Year and Excellence in Career and Technical Education.

Best practices for transition planning:

1. Invite all appropriate agency and school representatives to the IEP meeting well in advance.
2. Bring written literature and other information to share to the meeting.
3. Students should attend (preferably lead) their own IEP/transition meetings.
4. Transition should be discussed thoroughly.
5. Desired measurable post secondary/outcome completion goals should be well-written and cover:
 - Education/Training (required)
 - Employment (required)
 - Independent Living (as appropriate)
6. Based on administered transition assessments, include a list of the student's preferences, interests, strengths and needs in the transition plan.
7. All areas of transition needed for the student to successfully transition to post-secondary options must be addressed.
8. Goals that are measurable and attainable should be written into the transition plans.
9. The transition component should "drive" the rest of the IEP.
10. The progress of each goal should be measurable.
11. The persons/agencies involved with the attainment of each goal on the plan should be clearly listed.

StraightTalk

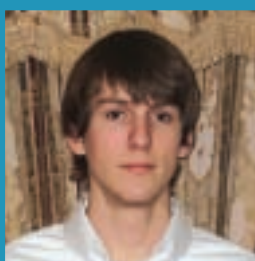
Club Helps STUDENT ADVOCATE for Self, Others

By Valerie Smith Buxton

Before he became one of the founding members of the Partners Club at Flowery Branch High School, Cody Smith didn't interact much with his peers.

"I have social anxiety disorder and didn't talk to people much. I always worried about talking in class and being the center of attention," he explained. "Partners Club helped me socialize with people in school and out of the school environment."

Smith, who graduated last spring, was one of the club's original members when it formed his sophomore year. As part of the club's advisory committee, Smith helped identify activities and programs for the members.



"I like to think I've helped somebody else – given them hope they will make it through."

One place the advisory committee looked for ideas was the Better All Together conference.

"I saw a lot of good programs and seminars (at the Better All Together Conference). That's how I got started on learning about IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) and how they function," he said.

While Smith had always attended his IEP meetings, what he learned at the conference helped him better understand his plan, how it worked and how it was put to use. He put his newfound knowledge to work on upgrading his own plan, but he didn't stop there.

Through Partners Club, Smith had made new friends who were also going through the IEP process. "I gave them pointers about talking to teachers about modifications and accommodations they need so they would have an easier time in their classes," he said.

"Without Partners Club, I don't think I would have had the chance to advocate for others because I wouldn't have talked to my peers about their problems."

Smith's participation in the club also led to other important outcomes for him. Through the club, Smith learned more about person-centered planning and decided to conduct a session for himself. "The person-centered planning meeting helped map out my likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, and it helped move my career path to pharmacy," he said.

As a result of that meeting, Smith decided to enroll in Gainesville College, where he will start in April. After two years, he hopes to transfer to the University of Georgia pharmacy program.

And the young man who was once anxious about being the center of attention has shared his success stories with members of the Partners in Policymaking class and the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities.

While the club has helped Smith participate more actively in his IEP and define his career goal, what he values most about his experience in Partners Club are the personal connections he's made.

"The people I met, the friendships I've gotten to make are the best parts of Partners. It taught me there's a lot to learn from other people. They might have a strength somewhere that they can use to help you with one of your weaknesses.

"I like to think I've helped somebody else – given them hope they will make it through. It's a very good program, and it opens up a lot of doors for students," he concluded. ●

"PARTNERS CLUB HELPED ME SOCIALIZE WITH PEOPLE IN SCHOOL AND OUT OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT."



APRIL

April 16-17
National Council on Disability Quarterly Meeting
 Atlanta, GA
www.ncd.gov/index.html

April 19-20
Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Quarterly Meeting & Public Forum
 Waycross, GA • 1-800-ASK-GCDD
www.gcdd.org

April 20, 23
Film - Darius Goes West: The Roll of His Life
 Atlanta, GA
www.atlantafilmfestival.com

April 25
Employment Capacity Building in Your Community: Collaboration, Means and Resources
 Savannah, GA • 404-477-2480
www.employmentfirstgeorgia.org

April 28-May 3
ADAPT Spring Action
 Washington, DC
www.adapt.org

MAY

May 11
Community Developers Association of Georgia Meeting
 Star Choices • Macon, GA
www.starchoices.org

May 17-18
Georgia Independent Living Network Annual Conference
 Atlanta, GA • 888-288-9780
www.silcga.org

May 19
Inaugural Georgia Walk for Autism
 Atlantic Station
 Registration 7 AM
 Atlanta, GA
www.autismwalk.org

May 22-May 24
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Conference
 Atlanta, Georgia
www.aaidd.org

JUNE

June 9
Yes, We Are Elected Ladies! Mothers of Children with Special Needs
 Crowne-Plaza Hotel
 Marietta, GA
 404-451-1811
blessed_nfs@yahoo.com

June 13-15, 2007
National Forum on Employment Issues & Latinos with Disabilities: Sixth Annual Bridges to Employment Conference
 Miami, FL
www.projectvision.net

June 15-19, 2007
Rehabilitation Engineering And Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) International Conference on Technology & Disability: Research, Design, Practice
 Phoenix, AZ
 703-524-6686
www.resna.org

June 22
Long Road Home March
 Atlanta, GA
 404-657-2125

June 27 - July 1
U.S. Social Forum
 Atlanta, GA
 404-586-0460, Ext. 32
www.ussf2007.org/

JULY

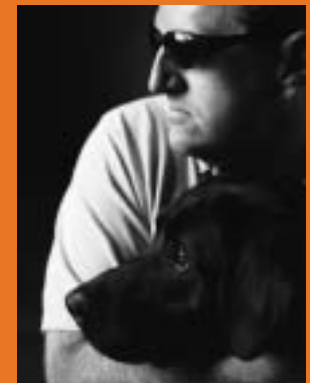
July 13
Community Developers Association of Georgia Meeting
 Star Choices
 Macon, GA
www.starchoices.org

July 17-21
Association on Higher Education And Disability Annual Conference
 Charlotte, NC
 704-947-7779
www.ahead.org

July 19-20
Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Quarterly Meeting & Awards Program
 Atlanta, GA
 1-800-ASK-GCDD
www.gcdd.org

Blind/Sight: Conversations WITH THE VISUALLY INSPIRED

MAY 1 - JUNE 22, 2007
 ARTS FOR ALL GALLERY
 ATLANTA, GA



This unique photographic exhibition tells the story of 12 people with vision loss through images and sound, showing a diversity of ages, ethnic backgrounds and types of vision loss from low vision to total blindness.

continued from page 7

including a report on elder abuse in Sacramento, Calif., a study of single parent issues and several community resource books.



John R. Lutzker, Ph.D., (University of Kansas) is the executive director of the Marcus Institute in Atlanta. Prior to that he was the distinguished consultant and chief of the Prevention Development and Evaluation Branch,

for the Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. He previously was the Florence and Louis Ross Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology, director of graduate training in behavioral psychology and acting provost at the University of Judaism in Bel Air, Calif. He is an adjunct professor of applied behavioral science at the University of Kansas and was president of Behavior Change Associates.

Dr. Meg Nichols is a private family practitioner in Macon, Ga. She and her husband Ronnie have nine children, including one who has an orthopedic disability. She graduated from Mercer University School of Medicine in 1994. Nichols is passionate about providing health care to those who need it most, and has done missionary work in Africa and set up clinics in Gulfport, Miss., after Hurricane Katrina.



She has served as Chief of Medicine and Chief of Staff at Coliseum

Northside Hospital, and is on the executive board for the Macon branch of the NAACP. Nichols also serves on the board for Power House, a program that works with inner city youth, and she is a volunteer faculty member of Mercer University.

James "Jim" F. Risher is a parent advocate from McDonough, Ga. Risher is president and owner of J.F. Risher and Associates, LLC, a building and grounds maintenance and property management company, and was recently appointed city of Hampton manager. He served as county manager of Henry County and is a veteran of the U.S. Naval Reserves. Risher earned a bachelor's degree from Arizona State University and a master's degree from Central Michigan University. He and his wife, Joan, have one grown child.



themselves and others. The students also advocated during Disability Day at the Capitol and marched for a common standard for alternative access to instructional materials and for additional funding to secure such access. They will participate in discussions with disability service providers and representatives of the publishing industry to receive and provide input toward reaching timely and equal access. From this pool of advocates, four students will be selected to serve on the Alternative Media Access Center (AMAC) Advisory Committee.

The Learning Disability Association of Georgia (LDAG) is one of 50 volunteer state organizations that work to enhance the quality of life for individuals of all ages with learning disabilities and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Members of the

Ten students with print-related disabilities from University System of Georgia (USG) institutions will be selected to train as advocates for alternative media and assistive technology.

New Advocacy Program Granted Funding

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is pleased to announce it will fund the Alternative Media Student Advocacy Initiative, organized by the Learning Disability Association of Georgia, Touch the Future Inc. and the Alternative Media Access Center.

Ten students with print-related disabilities from University System of Georgia (USG) institutions will be selected to train as advocates for alternative media and assistive technology. Upon completion of the training, students will return to their institutions and advocate for

LDAG are served by a state office, and volunteers provide resources and sponsor events. AMAC is housed at the University of Georgia, in Athens, and is an initiative of the University System of Georgia. LDAG is committed to removing barriers and providing access to knowledge for individuals with physical, sensory and learning print-related disabilities. ●



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Below, please find further resources of information related to the articles in this edition of *Making a Difference* magazine.

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD)

www.gcdd.org
404-657-2126 or
888-275-4233 (ASK-GCDD)

State Government

Department of Community Affairs
Georgia Housing Search
www.georgiahousingsearch.org
877-428-8844

Department of Community Health
www.dch.state.ga.us/
404-656-4507

Department of Human Resources
www.dhr.georgia.gov
404-656-4937

Department of Labor
www.dol.state.ga.us

General Information
www.georgia.gov

Georgia General Assembly
www.legis.state.ga.us/

Georgia House of Representatives
www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/house/index.htm

Georgia Senate
www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/senate/index.htm

Georgia Governor's Office
www.gov.state.ga.us/
404-656-1776

Georgia Lieutenant Governor's Office
www.ltgov.georgia.gov/02/ltgov/home/0,2214,2199618,00.html
404-656-5030

Faith

St. Michael Catholic Church
www.saintmichael.cc
770-534-3338

Transitioning

Portfolio Process
www.takealookatmeportfolio.com
706-542-3963

Partnerships for Success
www.partnershipsforsuccess.com
800-ASK-GCDD

Georgia Department of Education Transition Manual
www.doe.k12.ga.us/curriculum/exceptional/index.asp

Georgia Department of Education Division of Exceptional Students
www.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_exceptional.aspx
404-656-3963
bnations@doe.k12.ga.us



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S O U T H E R N C O M P A N Y

Proudly Salutes

*The 9th Annual Disability Day at the Capitol
February 22, 2007*



**Congratulations to the Governor's
Council on Developmental Disabilities
for Another Successful
Disability Day at the Capitol!**

From the staff of the State ADA Coordinator's Office



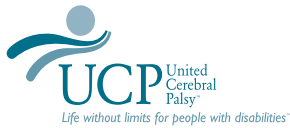
**Georgia State Financing & Investment Commission
State ADA Coordinator's Office
270 Washington Street • Second Floor • Atlanta, GA 30334
404-657-7313 • TTY 404-657-9993
www.ganet.org/gsfic/ada**





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www.albanyarc.org



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DISABILITY DAY 2007

Organized by GCDD, the 9th annual Disability Day this February was by far the largest. Atlanta Falcons quarterback and former University of Georgia SEC Champion, DJ Shockley joined 1,800 advocates at Georgia's Capitol for the "Make It Real" rally. The crowd was joined and addressed by several legislators as well, including Rep. Judy Manning (R-Marietta), Sen. Eric Johnson (R-Savannah) and Rep. Sharon Cooper (R-Marietta). For the full story, read page 8.



Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
2 Peachtree Street, NW, Suite 26-246
Atlanta, GA 30303-3142
404-657-2126, www.gcdd.org

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