

Making a Difference



NOVEMBER 3
2020
VOTE

FALL
2020

THE DISABILITY VOTE COUNTS 2020

gcdd.org



The State of Employment:
Collaboration, Change and
Solutions Amid COVID-19

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

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The Disability Vote Counts!

by Alyssa Lee, PsyD & Charlie Miller

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The State of Employment: Collaboration, Change and Solutions Amid COVID-19

by Clay Voytek

The widespread, existing issue of underemployment for people with disabilities has been exacerbated by the turmoil of COVID-19, but many see opportunities in a time of disruption and overhaul. Find out what is happening in Georgia to better serve people with disabilities in the employment arena.

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Making a Difference magazine is available online at gcdd.org in: English, Spanish, audio and large print. Previous issues are archived on the website as well.

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On the cover: The upcoming presidential election allows people with disabilities to make their voices heard. Remember to vote on November 3, 2020. (See pages 6-11).



A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY

As we move closer to 2021, we can either look at this time with regret and sadness – or as a time of opportunity. Though battling COVID-19 has meant being away from friends and family, new technology allows us to be together even when we are far apart. We at the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) have learned so much from YOU, those who continue to participate in the bi-weekly [Georgia Developmental Disabilities Network COVID-19 Zoom sessions](#) or the weekly [Community Strong virtual gatherings](#).

You have shown us how you have struggled to cope with COVID-19 and how you have overcome many challenges during this time. We have been and will continue to be with you every step of the way.

October is [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#). Read in this edition of *Making a Difference* about the opportunities we have towards creating a system that will help more people go to work. While the economy struggles to add more jobs, many people, including those with developmental disabilities, have lost their jobs or can't find a position. In addition, the legislature reduced the budgets of many state agencies that have had to reduce staff and services, including day services and competitive, integrated employment services. In this article, [state leadership talks about the opportunities and challenges that exist](#).

As I have written before, GCDD continues to work on its [Five Year Strategic Plan](#). I want to thank all of you who participated in the public input part of this process. We have held three townhall meetings, collected over 325 responses to our online survey and completed six focus groups. This information will help us determine what we will work on over the next five years. You will have the opportunity next spring to comment on what we have proposed to do.

One thing we heard from you all is concern about the status of legislative advocacy, especially in light of budget cuts. Specifically, many of you told us you were unhappy with how recent budget cuts, including \$91 million in cuts to services provided by the Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), will continue to impact our community. We also heard that you were looking for more ways for GCDD – and you! – to become involved in effective advocacy.

As a state agency that receives federal dollars, GCDD cannot aggressively lobby as one may traditionally think of lobbying. We are an advocacy organization charged with educating and informing the community and policymakers about what issues matter to the disability community. And, we are just one part of the puzzle. While GCDD helps to organize advocacy efforts by providing information and support, it is up to YOU, as Georgians, to also advocate and build relationships with lawmakers and other decision-makers that affect your everyday life. While it may be difficult during this time to come to the Capitol, your elected officials are in their communities and perhaps more accessible to you. Connect with them and educate them about issues such as the waiting list for home and community-based services. With the



Eric E. Jacobson

election just weeks away, this matters now more than ever! Ask those running for election if they will support increased funding for employment, housing and transportation services. We cannot tell your story for you. YOU are at the heart of what we, as an entire state, can accomplish.

Finally, we are changing a few things to the magazine. We will now feature an [Include College Corner](#), featuring stories of inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs around Georgia. And we are adding a [Self-Advocacy Spotlight](#), first-person essays written by members of Uniting for Change. Be sure to check this out and hear what people with developmental disabilities are saying about what happens in Georgia.

Check out GCDD's [website](#) and join our [advocacy network](#) so that you can stay informed. We hope you enjoy reading this magazine, and we want to hear from you. Let us know your thoughts by writing to Managing Editor Hillary Hibben at hillary.hibben@gcdd.ga.gov.

Eric E. Jacobson

Eric E. Jacobson
Executive Director, GCDD





Albany Tech Takes a L.E.A.P. for Students with I/DD

by Clay Voytek

Regina Watts is the special needs and disability services coordinator at Albany Technical College and the director of Leveraging Education for Advancement Program (L.E.A.P.), the school's inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) program.

Watts started the program shortly after arriving at Albany Tech. She had worked in the disability space for over a decade prior, and she had seen the need for an inclusive pathway. "I wanted to create a program for those students that would possibly not have the opportunity to go to college."

At L.E.A.P., students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) take courses with peers and receive support through mentorship. After two years, students earn a certificate and graduate with their class.

There are now nine IPSE programs in the state of Georgia. L.E.A.P., entering its fifth year, is the only one hosted by a technical school, where extra emphasis is given to hands-on education and practical experience.

Students enrolled in the program typically complete a Business Office Assistant certificate, a credential approved by the Technical College System of Georgia and made up of six courses also available to Albany Tech's larger student population.

Recently, the school's board approved Watts for 15 other certificates that students had expressed interest in. This semester is the first time a student has registered for a new certification. The student registered for an

Infant/Toddler Childcare Specialist certificate, and her ultimate goal is to work at a day care.

"Students who probably would not have had an opportunity to go to college can come to the L.E.A.P. program and get what they need academically, socially and mentally as well – get the tools that [will] help them go into the world of independent living," Watts said. "It means the world to me."

Despite the disruptions of COVID-19, there are currently seven students enrolled in L.E.A.P. Three of the students are attending virtually, and four are taking classes on campus. One of the students in L.E.A.P. is currently completing his last course, and the program welcomed two new students this semester, one of whom is a dual-enrolled high school student.

Students in the program are exposed to a variety of experiences, including conferences, internships, mock interviews, volunteering and job-shadowing. COVID-19 has disrupted many of these opportunities, but the work hasn't stopped by any means.

The program currently has two mentor/tutors available to students for personalized assistance, one on campus and one virtual. Watts says that virtual learning is as inclusive as it can be, but she's currently working

ALBANY TECH RECENTLY APPROVED

15 NEW CERTIFICATES



FOR INCLUSIVE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS

out ways to create a more fulfilling digital experience with virtual tours and workshops.

Under Watts' direction, the program has been able to leverage its position at a small, technical college to best accommodate those it serves. She hopes to keep it small and flexible, so she can continue providing her students with thoughtful and effective services.

"I want to give an example of my very first student," said Watts. "He is the innovator in the video on my webpage. He blossomed into the person who was able to create a video, to be a part of the video that introduces what the L.E.A.P. program is all about. I am just so happy to be able to help someone to achieve their dreams."

Read the extended article on GCDD's website.



Exercise Your Voting Rights

by John McCarty

Uniting for Change is a grassroots network of self-advocates that is growing the self-advocacy movement in Georgia. Along with family members, allies and supporters, self-advocates work on “uniting Georgians and influencing change by speaking up and taking control of our lives.”



Below is an article from John McCarty, consultant and member of the Uniting for Change Leadership Collective, about what voting means to him as a citizen and self-advocate.

I've always been interested in news. The news about how the government operates and what the government is doing has always fascinated me. I listen to NPR, and I read articles from several newspapers, including the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. I also

listen to my family talking about current events.

After I turned 18, I was

interested in voting, but I was under guardianship. My family was unsure if guardianship precluded my voting, and we could not find a clear

statement in my guardianship ruling. We did some research and found that, in Georgia, if the guardianship order does not specifically say that voting is not allowed, a person under guardianship has the right to vote.

I registered as a voter online using my Georgia ID number. Now came the critical part. How would I vote? Specifically, I wasn't worried about for whom I would vote, but whether I would do it in person or by mail. Since I need physical support, I knew I could request a mail-in ballot.

For the past four years, I have voted in every election, including run-offs. Mostly I have used an absentee, or mail-in, ballot. Once, when a requested ballot did not come in the mail, I went to the polling place and signed an affidavit saying that I never got the absentee ballot.

When the full ballot comes in the mail, now is the fun part: the research. I learn as much as possible about each of the candidates. My sources of information include the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the League of Women Voters, *Ballotpedia*, candidate websites and the *North Fulton Neighbor* (my local weekly town newspaper). When I have questions not answered in any of those places, I email candidates.

When I spend time thinking about what is important in my life,

disability issues rank right up there; that is often the topic of my emails. Some candidates never respond. Some give complete and detailed answers. My vote is guided by both non-answers and detailed ones.

I once asked a candidate, “Where do you stand on disability issues?” His response was, “What issues?” Needless to say, he didn't get my vote.

I once asked a candidate, “Where do you stand on disability issues?” His response was, “What issues?” Needless to say, he didn't get my vote.

I will continue to vote in every election. I am proud to exercise my right as a citizen of the United States of America.

In Georgia, if the guardianship order does not specifically say that voting is not allowed, a person under guardianship has the right to vote.

DID YOU KNOW?

Supported Decision-Making

is an alternative to guardianship that allows people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to preserve their rights, like the right to vote. Author John McCarty serves on the Supported Decision-Making Advisory Council at the Georgia Advocacy Office.

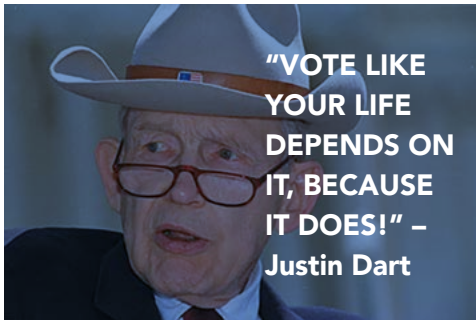
Uniting Georgians and influencing change by speaking up and taking control of our lives

uniting for change

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THE DISABILITY VOTE COUNTS!

by Alyssa Lee, PsyD, GCDD Public Policy Research & Development Director and Charlie Miller, GCDD Legislative Advocacy Director



will choose between the current president and a challenger. We have been encouraged to see more robust disability plans during this presidential race than in years prior. Below is a brief overview of each candidate's disability platform.

As an incumbent president, we can look to Trump's proposed plans, as well as his record on key issues while in office. Although disability policy is not specifically mentioned, we can look at the areas where we most often see policies created that impact people with disabilities: employment, education and healthcare.

Employment: Trump touts his influence on an improved economy, which has seen record job growth and increased wages for workers. Of note, disability employment is not highlighted, and the unemployment rate for people with disabilities continues to hover around 70 percent.

Education: Trump and his administration state their support on the expansion of school choice. It is important to note that many in the disability community have voiced strong concerns regarding school choice expansion, as private education systems are not bound to the same requirements to support children with disabilities as the public school system.

Healthcare: Trump has called for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act insurance mandate, which means people would no longer be penalized for not having health insurance. However, concerning healthcare policy in the disability



In this edition of *Public Policy for the People*, we will be focusing on the upcoming 2020 election, which sees key national and state seats up for grabs. This election will certainly be one for the history books, as much of our attention has been paid to the current COVID-19 pandemic, making this campaign season unlike any in modern history.

To prepare you for the upcoming election, we want to make sure you are an informed voter, not only on the candidates and their platforms, but also on your rights as a voter.

Let's discuss which seats are up for election and where the candidates stand on issues important to the disability community.

FEDERAL RACES*

Candidates for President of the United States

Every four years, we elect the next incoming president. During this presidential election, we

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE



Incumbent Donald J. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence

President Donald J. Trump is the 45th president of the United States of America representing the Republican Party. Trump ran as a member of the Republican Party, and he beat the Democratic challenger former Secretary Hillary Clinton by 77 votes in the Electoral College. [You can read more about Trump's campaign here.](#)





community, Trump has consistently proposed budget cuts to Medicaid and other disability-specific programs, such as the Special Olympics, which includes a strong initiative to improve the health and wellness of people with disabilities.

Additional policy considerations:

Access to Housing: Although no official statement appears on the campaign website, the candidate's position on this issue is made clear in the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency press statement about its [new budget](#). Some of Trump's budget modifications include \$2.8 billion to assist the fight to end homelessness; a record \$425 million to boost healthy homes; and also \$41.3 billion to help Americans pay rent. However, it is important to note that Trump's budget proposal for HUD had push back from both Republican and Democratic lawmakers, as the proposal requested a 15.2 percent cut, which would translate to an \$8.6 billion budget cut.

Transportation: Although no official statement appears on the campaign website regarding transportation for people with disabilities, the candidate did address transportation for people with disabilities in his [interview with the American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\) in 2015](#). He states, "This is a critical question that must be dealt with by the federal government. We should integrate into our investments in infrastructure and transportation, assets and policies that provide for the services required by people with disabilities, to the extent possible."

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE



**Vice President
Joe Biden and Senator
Kamala Harris**

Joe Biden was the 47th vice president of the United States and former U.S. Senator from Delaware. He won the Democratic nomination for president in 2020. [You can find more information on the Biden-Harris campaign website.](#)

The campaign has released the "Biden Plan for Full Participation and Equality for People with Disabilities," which outlines his campaign's priority policy areas to improve supports and services for people with disabilities. Biden has also developed a [specific plan to support people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

It is important to note that as a challenger, we do not yet have specific examples of what actions Biden has taken as president. We can, however, provide information regarding his promises on disability issues. Some of Biden's disability policy proposals include:

Employment: Biden has stated his support for expanding competitive, integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities. He has also promised to phase out subminimum wage for people with disabilities by supporting and



getting passed the [Transformation to Competitive Employment Act](#).

Education: As a U.S. Senator, Biden supported the passage of the original [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) in 1975 and has promised as president to fully fund IDEA. Biden has also promised to direct his Health and Human Services (HHS) department to ensure all eligible children receive [Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment \(EPSDT\)](#) services. For older students, Biden has promised to increase funding for [Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(TPSID\)](#), an initiative that provides funding for inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) programs in Georgia.

Healthcare: Biden has promised to increase access to home and community-based services (known in Georgia as NOW/COMP, ICWP and CCSP Medicaid waivers); invest in the direct care workforce; and support informal and family caregivers.

Additional policy considerations:

Housing: Biden has promised to expand affordable, accessible housing options for people with disabilities and has indicated he will secure investments to the [Supportive Housing for Individuals with Disabilities](#) (also known as "Section 811") programs.

Transportation: Biden has promised to address accessibility barriers to transportation for people with disabilities. He specifically indicated support for incorporating universal design into new modes of transportation and ensuring the accessibility of air travel.

Candidates for U.S. President (con't)

LIBERTARIAN CANDIDATE



Dr. Jo Jorgensen

Dr. Jo Jorgensen is a senior lecturer in psychology at Clemson University. Dr. Jorgensen does not have a disability-specific platform. As she has not held

public office, we do not have access to any previous actions that have impacted the disability community. [However, you can read more about her positions here.](#)

GREEN PARTY CANDIDATE



Howie Hawkins

Howie Hawkins is a retired construction worker and a member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, where he worked at UPS. Hawkins has run

for the Governor of New York in 2010, 2014 and 2018.

Hawkins does not have a disability-specific platform and does not have a voting history to discuss from previous public office holdings. [You can read more about his positions here.](#)



For a great overview of the candidates running for president in 2020, including a list of each of their platforms, feel free to visit [#CripTheVote's blog on the 2020 presidential candidates.](#)

GEORGIA-BASED RACES TO WATCH

For the past few decades, Georgia has been considered a solidly Republican state; however, over the last few years, Georgia has started to poll toward the middle of the political spectrum, which has created increased interest and investment in our U.S. Senate and House of Representatives races. In this section, we review key federal races to watch in Georgia.

GEORGIA'S U.S. SENATE RACE



Sen. David Perdue
Republican (Incumbent)



Jon Ossoff
Democrat

Georgia's U.S. Senate Race: Perdue/Ossoff

In one race, we have incumbent Senator [David Perdue](#) (R) running against challenger [Jon Ossoff](#) (D). Both are likely familiar names, as Perdue has served in the U.S. Senate since 2015, and Ossoff ran for Georgia's 6th congressional district during the 2017 special election, which was one of the most expensive House races in the country.

Although neither have a specific disability platform, you can find out more information about their stances, including Perdue's voting history below:

- [Ballotpedia - Sen. Perdue](#)
- [Ballotpedia - Ossoff](#)

Georgia's U.S. Senate Race: Special Election - Jungle Primary

Our second U.S. Senate race can be a bit confusing, as it is not happening during the typical election timeline for that specific seat. After Sen. Johnny Isakson announced his early retirement, Governor Brian Kemp appointed Sen. [Kelly Loeffler](#) to hold that seat until the upcoming election on Nov. 3. This specific election did

not have a primary election prior to the general election, which typically serves to narrow down the field of candidates running.

The reason this election is called a "jungle primary" is because *all* candidates could run for the same office, regardless of political

party. As such, we find ourselves with multiple candidates from the Republican and Democratic parties running for the seat. In order to secure a victory, the top candidate must receive a majority of the vote. In the real likelihood that no single candidate receives a majority of the vote, the top two candidates will compete in a runoff election in January 2021.

Here is a breakdown of all those candidates, separated by party. Of note, no candidate in this race has created a disability-specific platform.

REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES

Please click on each candidate's name to be taken to their "Issues" webpage to learn more about each candidate's positions.



GEORGIA'S U.S. SENATE RACE: SPECIAL ELECTION



Sen. Kelly Loeffler
Republican (Incumbent)



Rep. Doug Collins
Republican



Rev. Raphael Warnock
Democrat



Ed Tarver
Democrat

- **Incumbent Senator Kelly Loeffler**
- **Challenger Doug Collins**

As both Republican candidates have served in public office, you can visit the links below to learn more about their voting history.

- **Ballotpedia – Sen. Loeffler**
- **Ballotpedia – Rep. Collins**

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES

Please click on each candidate's name to be taken to their "Issues" webpage to learn more about each candidate's positions. As Ed Tarver was a former US Attorney, Southern District of GA, click on Ballotpedia for info as well.

- **Rev. Raphael Warnock**
- **Ed Tarver**
- **Ballotpedia – Ed Tarver**

Key Congressional District Race to Watch: Georgia's 6th District

For decades, Georgia's 6th district for the U.S. House of Representatives has been a solid Republican seat whose winners – Newt Gingrich, Johnny Isakson and Tom Price – became major

figures in the Republican Party. Georgia has slowly shown more diversity within its elections, which is why the 6th district is on our hot list of races to watch. The two candidates for the current 2020 election include:

- **Incumbent Rep. Lucy McBath (D)**
- **Challenger Karen Handel (R)**

As both candidates have served in public office, you can visit the links below to learn more about their voting history.

- **Ballotpedia – Rep. McBath**
- **Ballotpedia – Handel**

Key Congressional District Race to Watch: Georgia's 5th District

Georgia's 5th congressional district was represented by the late congressman John Lewis since 1987. For the first time in over 30 years, this district will now be represented by someone new, so we included it in our list of races to watch. Lewis originally won the 2020 Democratic primary race for the seat before his unexpected passing. Georgia's Democratic



Party then selected state Senator Nikema Williams to serve as the Democratic candidate on the ballot. The two candidates include:

- **Sen. Nikema Williams (D)**
- **Angela Stanton King (R)**

STATE RACES*

Don't forget that local seats matter too! With the federal election coming up we must not forget an important fact: **local senators and representatives are also up for election.** Georgia has 56 state senators and 180 state representatives, and they are ALL up for election.

Visit [Open States](#) online to find out which state senate and house district you live in, and the current state legislators who represent you.

You can even see the committees the legislators serve on and the bills they have sponsored. Visit [Ballotpedia](#) to learn more about the election history of your state-level districts and whether or not your current legislator has a general election challenger.

** It is important to note that GCDD does not endorse any candidate and that the enclosed*

information encompasses only a small piece of a larger political platform for each candidate. We encourage you reach out to them with questions of your own – and to vote.



GCDD'S PUBLIC POLICY TEAM



ALYSSA LEE, PsyD,
GCDD Public Policy Research & Development Director



CHARLIE MILLER,
GCDD Legislative Advocacy Director

GEORGIA'S 6TH DISTRICT RACE



Karen Handel
Republican



Rep. Lucy McBath
Democrat (Incumbent)

GEORGIA'S 5TH DISTRICT RACE



Sen. Nikema Williams
Democrat



Angela Stanton King
Republican

WHAT TO KNOW AT THE POLLS



There's a lot of information out there. Here's how to make sure you're prepared to make your vote count.

Cheri Mitchell is a member of the HAVA (Help America Vote Act) Team at the [Georgia Advocacy Office \(GAO\)](#). Here are some of the most common issues she sees voters with disabilities have on election day, as well as how to navigate them.

WHERE DO I GO TO VOTE?

Voters can find their polling place online at the Georgia Secretary of State (SOS)'s website: mvp.sos.ga.gov. The SOS also has a smartphone app available.

WILL THE POLLING PLACE BE ACCESSIBLE TO ME?

By law, all polling places should be accessible. The Secretary of State will be providing "readers" to those who need them for the paper ballot printed at the end of a voter's session. If you would like to familiarize yourself ahead of time with Georgia's new voting machine, [watch Georgia Public Broadcasting's video here](#).

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A VOTER?

"Under the Help America Vote Act, voters with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities for both access and participation as all other voters," Mitchell says. "Additionally, Title II of the

Americans with Disabilities Act requires that governments provide people with disabilities a full and equal opportunity to vote."

The Georgia Advocacy Office will also release a survey in November following the election for voters with disabilities who experienced issues voting in the election. If you would like to receive a survey, contact Mitchell by email at cmitchell@thegao.org or call the GAO office at 404-885-1234.

IS TRANSPORTATION AVAILABLE?

You have a few options for getting to the polls. Uber and Lyft often offer discounts for rides, and if you have a MARTA Mobility Breeze Card, you may be able to make a reservation for a ride to your polling location.

Mitchell says there are multiple organizations that may be able to assist voters with transportation: "The Georgia Democrats Voter Protection Line (888-730-5816) has provided free rides to the polls, and the Republican Party of Georgia may also be able to assist (404-257-5559). You may also try the League of Women Voters (404-522-4598)."

Voters unable to get to their polling place may request a mail-in ballot and vote from home. "The ballot must be received by your county registrar by the time the polls close for voting," Mitchell says. You can request a mail-in ballot anytime between 180 days before the election to the Friday before the election (Oct. 30).

AM I ALLOWED AN ASSISTANT INSIDE THE POLLING PLACE?

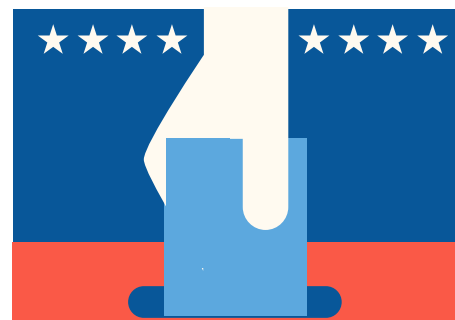
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 allows voters to bring someone with them to assist them with voting. In a federal election, this can be anyone except

an employer, a representative of your employer, or a representative of your union, if you belong to one. Poll workers and watchers who are residents of your precinct are not allowed to help.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I KNOW?

If you run into any issues while voting, ask for a provisional ballot. You have 48 hours to resolve the issue, and you can see the status of your provisional ballot through the SOS app or website. Mitchell says to vote early in the day if you can. "In Georgia, voters with disabilities do not have to wait in line at a polling place if they arrive between 9:30 AM and 4:30 PM," she says.

Your vote counts. Take your time and ask for help if you need it.



"Under the Help America Vote Act, voters with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities for both access and participation as all other voters."

CHERI MITCHELL
Member, HAVA Team, Georgia Advocacy Office



GAO'S VOTER PROTECTION HOTLINE:

From now through election day, voters with disability-related issues can call GAO at:

**(404) 885-1234 or
(800) 537-2329!**

Having trouble registering to vote, requesting an absentee ballot, accessing early voting, etc.? Leave a message and someone will contact you within two business days!

★ VOTING 101

STEP 1

Check in with a poll worker.

- Provide a valid photo ID, which the poll worker will scan to verify that your voter registration information is correct.
- Sign the Elector Oath.
- The poll worker will then load your ballot onto a voter access card and hand it to you.

STEP 2

Place the voter access card into the voting machine.

- The ballot will appear on the screen and you will make your selections.
- Accessible options are located in the top right corner of the screen:
 - Change language
 - Text size
 - Screen reader
 - High contrast view
 - Sip and puff technology for the physically impaired

STEP 3

Select your candidates by touching the screen.

- If you would like to change your choice, touch that candidate again and the screen will clear.
- You can review your choices when you are done selecting.

STEP 4

Print and review your ballot.

STEP 5

Insert the ballot into the scanner, which will confirm that your vote has been cast.



VOTER CHECKLIST

REGISTER TO VOTE

- Visit mvp.sos.ga.gov.
- Enter your name, date of birth, address, county of residence and your driver's license or state ID number.
- Applications can be completed online or printed and mailed in.

VOTING IN PERSON ON ELECTION DAY

- You must be registered to vote.
- Bring **ONE** photo ID to your polling place:
 - Any valid state or federal government-issued photo ID, including a free Voter Identification Card issued by your County Registrar's Office or the Georgia Department of Driver Services
 - A Georgia driver's license, even if expired
 - Valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency or entity of the U.S. government, Georgia, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state
 - Valid U.S. passport
 - Valid U.S. military photo ID
 - Valid tribal photo ID

The information on these two pages was taken from: *Your Vote Counts*, GCDD's guide for Georgians with disabilities heading to the polls. [The complete guide is available here.](#)

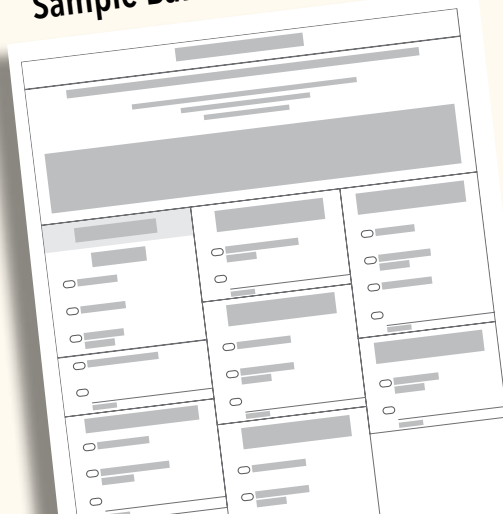


★ RESOURCES

How to download a sample ballot or apply for an absentee ballot:

1. Visit mvp.sos.ga.gov.
2. Once there, you will need to enter information such as your name, date of birth and county of residence.
3. If you're not registered, you can do so by supplying your driver's license or state ID number.
4. Applications can be completed online or printed and mailed in.

Sample Ballot



Additional voting resources for people with disabilities:

[REV UP GEORGIA: REGISTER, EDUCATE, VOTE, USE YOUR POWER](#)

A nationwide advocacy group with a Georgia chapter

- [facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia](https://www.facebook.com/RevUpGeorgia)
- twitter.com/RevUpGeorgia
- aapd.com/advocacy/voting

ACLU OF GEORGIA

Advocates for the voting rights for all residents of Georgia

- acluga.org

The State of Employment: Collaboration, Change and Solutions Amid COVID-19

by Clay Voytek

Entrepreneur
Brandon Cantrell
likes being his
own boss.



On June 16, 2020, Governor Brian Kemp announced Chris Wells as the new executive director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). The agency has been undergoing re-organization for the past five years, meaning it has been in a state of perpetual change.

Before Wells' arrival, GVRA began a major reorganization after years of criticism. The agency, which serves as Georgia's main employment services resource for people with disabilities, conducted an independent review that identified major problems, including a problematic internal culture, low case closure rate, too many managers and too few well-trained agents.

There have been four executive directors at GVRA in the last five years. Wells' two predecessors similarly reorganized the agency

under the direction of outside consultants. Wells is trying to manage the restructuring while keeping clients safe in a pandemic, in part by using technology and working with providers to offer virtual services. Mainly, he's working to return the agency to full service as a reformed body, more accessible and collaborative moving forward.

The widespread, existing issue of underemployment for people with disabilities has been exacerbated by the turmoil of COVID-19, but many advocates and government administrators see opportunities in a time of disruption and overhaul.

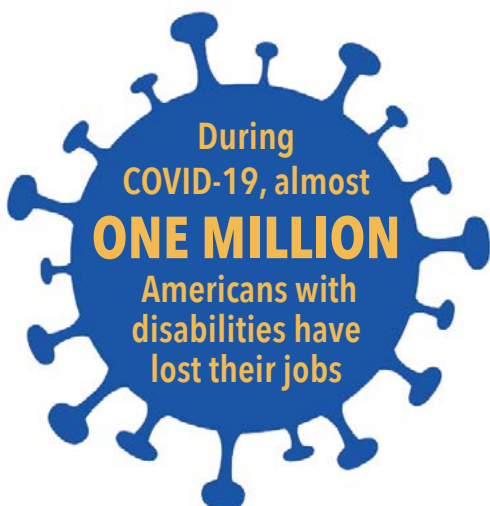
"I think that agencies are starting to think about where we can move resources to have the greatest impact on somebody's life," said Eric Jacobson, the executive director of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD).

Since July, GVRA has updated its provider manual, case management system and customer

care line. "That way, when we do come out of the pandemic, we've addressed some of the concerns from a data-driven analysis perspective," Wells said.

Advocates in Georgia's disability community have long pointed to employment as an area in need of improvement, as many individuals have trouble finding effective and accessible employment supports such as job development and job coaching. As with many disability services, opportunities vary by location, and no two people are the same.

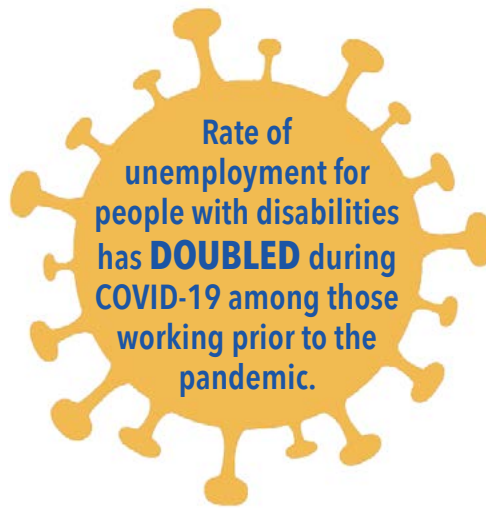
Some individuals don't seek state assistance, but that doesn't mean they aren't on their own path forward. In 2010, Jenna Quigley and Donna Williams



Donna Williams and Jenna Quigley started a greeting card business called Just for You Card Art.

started a greeting card business called Just for You Card Art. The best friends had a shared passion and idea: a way to make money doing what they already found fun and relaxing.

With help from parents and organizations, the two began making cards and fulfilling orders that ranged from birthday greeting cards to wedding invitations. Together, Quigley and Williams traveled to present at conferences and meet prospective customers.



almost one million Americans with disabilities have lost their jobs, according to the New Hampshire University Institute on Disability, and other data shows that those with disabilities have been hit harder than others.

Before the pandemic, people with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be unemployed than those without a disability. In February, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in the working-age population was 7.3 percent. In July, the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) released unpublished BLS data showing the unemployment rate had risen to 14.8 percent for people with disabilities who were working before the pandemic. According to BLS, one in five workers with a disability have lost their jobs since March, versus one in seven of the broader working population.

Employment Services, Councils & Initiatives Adapt

A variety of agencies, institutions and organizations are tasked with empowering individuals on their journey to independent living, and underemployment has long been a key advocacy issue. In order to meet the needs of a population as large and

heterogeneous as the disability community, agencies need to be flexible and collaborative.

As government entities face changing circumstances, they have the opportunity to review priorities and reassess best practices. Current interruptions to services are felt by both providers and those needing support. It is more critical than ever for all service systems to work together in order to meet the changing needs of the communities they serve; unfortunately, these systems aren't always in alignment.

WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT WE CAN HELP PEOPLE EXIST IN THIS KIND OF NEW CLIMATE: RIGHT NOW, IF A PERSON ASKS FOR SELF-EMPLOYMENT OR MICRO-ENTERPRISE SUPPORT AT DBHDD OR GVRA, THEY'RE LIKELY NOT GOING TO GET IT.



“We have to make sure that we can help people exist in this kind-of new climate: telework, entrepreneurship, micro-enterprise,” said Doug Crandell, an expert in customized employment and disability employment policy at the Institute on Human Development and Disability (IHDD) at University of Georgia. “All of that is possible, but we’ve got to align what we’re doing. And right now, if a person asks for self-employment or micro-enterprise support at Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) or GVRA, they’re likely not going to get it.”



The widespread, existing issue of underemployment for people with disabilities has been exacerbated by the turmoil of COVID-19.

By early 2020, both had settled into part-time restaurant jobs. Before the pandemic picked up, they had been receiving orders for hundreds of cards, but the process wasn't as relaxing anymore. Quigley and Williams, enjoying their new jobs, decided the card business had naturally run its course, and they dissolved the company.

“We loved doing it,” Quigley said. “My favorite part was to show them to people. I made a lot of people’s day – to be happy, to be surprised.”

Still, the two catch up constantly on Zoom. Williams is back working as a barista at BrewAble Cafe, and Quigley is waiting to return to her job at Pancake Social until it’s a little safer. She’s been visiting the restaurant for takeout, and the manager calls her to check in.

Unfortunately, not everyone has been able to secure work through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of the crisis,

One agency won't single-handedly solve underemployment for folks with disabilities, but they can improve their services to make a stronger impact. DBHDD oversees a network of approximately 700 community-based service providers for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as the administration of COMP and NOW Waivers.

Ultimately, DBHDD connects people to services, and Commissioner Judy Fitzgerald recently announced an effort to prioritize employment. Wells of GVRA recognizes his agency's past shortcomings, and he also has a different vision moving forward.

IF WE WANT PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO MOVE TOWARDS COMPETITIVE, INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT, DOES THE WAY WE SPEND OUR DOLLARS HELP MOVE PEOPLE IN THAT DIRECTION?



In 2018, the Georgia General Assembly passed House Bill 831, Georgia's Employment First Act, which established the state as one where competitive, integrated employment is the "first and preferred" option for people with disabilities, regardless of the severity of the disability. The legislation also created the Employment First Council (EFC), which is federally funded.

"They have the legislative authority to create that set of recommendations, give it to the governor, give it to the legislature, and push policies that are going to be more friendly towards getting

people work," said Jacobson, who sits on the council.

The EFC is made up of 14 individuals with disabilities, ties to the community or involvement in state agencies serving the community. Chaired by the executive director of GVRA, now Wells, the council meets quarterly and releases an annual report. The report is typically released in October, but it will be delayed this year.

Wells says the council needs a strategic plan moving forward, and they've moved to establish one when they meet again in October. Other members also say now is the time, when nothing is normal, to create a shared outlook.

"I think we have to keep our eye on the goal," said John Wells, the vice chair of the EFC (no relation to Chris Wells). "We are transitioning from sitting at home, or sitting in day services, to employment. Everybody needs to be on the same page; everybody needs to coordinate their efforts."

Many professionals and advocates around the state are working to facilitate employment in a changing landscape. Fitzgerald says that an economic downturn could have a silver lining in honing services.

"We have to make sure we don't have redundancies," Fitzgerald said. "The most important question we ask for ourselves ... is, how do we use state and federal funds to incentivize the right things? So, if we want people to be able to move towards competitive, integrated employment, does the way we spend our dollars help move people in that direction?"

Jacobson says that dollar allocations of budgets are their own priority

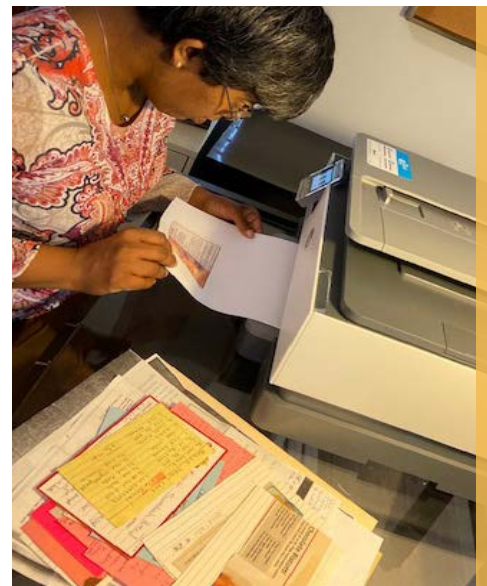
statements, and it's important they reflect the community's needs. Crandell notes that the ongoing, collective disruption to daily life is an opportunity for providers to adapt.

"We need to change policies and procedures – both in our Medicaid Waiver funding and with vocational rehabilitation – around making sure people have access to telework, supported self-employment, [and] entrepreneurial initiatives," Crandell said. "That's something I think we'll see a lot more of post-pandemic."

Emerging Solutions: Entrepreneurship, Self-Employment and Micro-Enterprise

Nandi Isaac is a self-advocate, businesswoman and Special Olympics athlete from Macon, GA. In 2007, Isaac founded Scan with Nan, a micro-business and digital preservation service for photographs and documents.

After holding various jobs that didn't work out, Isaac discovered her passion for photography through a local club called the ShutterBugs Club. She credits the club with enhancing her ability to look at pictures and study them carefully. From the hobby, she was able to find a passion and business.



Nandi Isaac saves people's memories through her own micro-business.

A trained broadcast radio journalist and DJ, Sulaimon Salam Bamidele started his own media company in 2015.



“Being a businesswoman and being self-employed made me have confidence and made me a better self-advocate in my community,” Isaac said. “And I met really cool people, and I got to save their memories.”

Isaac received support from her family and community, and she now has an operational website and social media accounts, though marketing is a challenge for her. After 13 years in business, Isaac thinks self-employment is an ideal option for people with developmental disabilities. “They can use their given talents, be flexible with time and use supports at home based on their needs.”

The 2019 [BLS report on labor force characteristics](#) found that, “a larger share of workers with a disability were self-employed in 2019 than were those with no disability (10 percent versus 5.9 percent).” Isaac’s story is one piece of a larger trend that providers and agencies are beginning to catch onto.

[Sulaimon Salam Bamidele](#) is originally from Nigeria, and he’s a trained broadcast radio journalist and DJ. Salam says his experience becoming blind, and the listless days that followed, led him to his passion for journalism. His local school system in Nigeria did not support his education, so he was at home while school aged. A family member told him about a school for the blind which he began attending at the age of 18. Salam now hopes to disseminate useful information to the world and make an impact.

After coming to the U.S. in 2014, Salam was staying with his godmother when her husband suggested he start his own media company. The conversation

planted a seed, and the possibilities instantly came to him. Salam is now the owner of SUSABAM GD Communications, Inc. He produces a daily live show on [Great Dreams Radio](#), a subsidiary he calls “GD radio station.”

“Choosing to work for myself, to create my own business, allows me to have unlimited space to be creative and to impact the community and the people at large,” he said.

Getting started, Salam had just one computer, so he couldn’t DJ while transmitting a radio broadcast. Eventually, he was able to save up and buy another. He was able to build resources, develop his network and grow his operation. Salam enjoys his work, and he enjoys being self-employed.

“I want to work with my own time,” Salam said. “I’m a creative person. I don’t like to be limited. I love my space, I cherish my time and I use those to the best of my ability.”

[Synergies Work](#) is a Georgia-based, nonprofit organization that provides funding and guidance to entrepreneurs who may not otherwise have the opportunity to start a business. The organization and its founder, [Aarti Sahgal](#), had a prominent hand in the development of Isaac’s and Salam’s businesses.

“This is the biggest minority in our country,” said Sahgal. “And yet, when we talk about diversity, we don’t talk about disability.”

Our approach to employment is limited. We talk about choices, but we’re not giving that choice when it comes to employment.”

Sahgal sees this as the right time and place for Synergies Work to grow and continue to fill a vital need. Sahgal notes that the access to conventional professional networks is lacking for young people with disabilities, a critical disadvantage in the worlds of business and entrepreneurship.

“Running a business is running on a treadmill,” said Sahgal. “If you stop, you’re going to fall. That’s what I’m interested in. How do you make sure that the businesses that you’re setting up become sustainable?”

”
Our approach to employment is limited. We talk about choices, but we’re not giving that choice when it comes to employment.

At Synergies Work, the goal is to provide unique, personalized service in the form of technology, resources and contacts at no cost to entrepreneurs. [Minna Hong](#) is a mixed medium artist, entrepreneur and board member at Synergies Work. Hong says some entrepreneurs are ready to sell a product, and some are nowhere near close. For them, it’s about empowering someone to move further along in their journey and closer to their goal. “They have to do as much if not more,” she said.

[Brandon Cantrell](#) is another entrepreneur with a passion for crochet. Cantrell was introduced to Sahgal through the [Georgia Advocacy Office](#) earlier this

year. Sahgal showed Cantrell that money could be made with his hobby and helped set up his website. Before they met, he was giving his creations away.

Before starting his micro-enterprise business, [Crochet by Brandon](#), Cantrell sought support through multiple agencies and local providers, but GVRA services and DBHDD day programs were unfulfilling. He had loved crochet since his grandmother showed it to him when he was 10 years old, and with a new perspective, he was able to turn it into more.



Brandon Cantrell turned his passion for crochet into his own business, [Crochet by Brandon](#).

“It lets me be my own boss,” Cantrell said. “It lets me make my own hours. It gives me a shot at doing something I enjoy and seeing people’s reaction. Having a purpose. It makes me feel like a contributing member of society.”

Cantrell works in his crafts room. He hands out business cards wherever he goes. His sales have seen a downturn, as with many others, but Cantrell and his mother expect business to pick up as the weather gets colder.

Supporting Entrepreneurs

Starting from scratch is hard work. Universally, entrepreneurs need support, whether their business is large or small. Many join incubators or get connected with mentors. Nandi Isaac was having the most trouble with her digital presence and marketing before she got connected to Sahgal.

“Becoming a businesswoman has taught me how to use technology and marketing,” said Isaac. “This has improved my life and my ability to be a self-advocate.”

Quigley and Williams appreciate their family, friends and community for their help, and they’re not worried about the future. Both are enjoying their current jobs, but they cherished their experience as business owners and entrepreneurs. Quigley sees self-employment as a viable option for other people with disabilities. “I think other people can help them and support them in the right direction.”

There are many organizations that offer help and resources, including the [Advancing Employment Technical Assistance Center](#) at IHDD. The [Georgia Micro Enterprise Network](#) (GMEN) is a nonprofit organization that supports and funds underserved entrepreneurs.

In some states, agencies have sought out opportunities to receive support to adopt new solutions. Through ODEP’s [Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment](#) (ASPIRE) program, 12 states and Washington D.C. will receive assistance aligning their disability employment systems and implementing specific plans through policy and strategy coordination.

Starting from scratch is hard work. Universally, entrepreneurs need support, whether their business is large or small.

Georgia is not one of the states in the program, but ODEP is implementing a broader initiative called Visionary Opportunities to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment (VOICE) that could be taken advantage of in the future.

“DBHDD doesn’t do anything alone,” Fitzgerald said. “Our success is dependent on providers, families, academic partners – real experts who continue to advise us, and most importantly, people with disabilities who show us the way and make sure their voices are leading the work.”

Getting support for employment and aligning advocacy is more vital than ever during a pandemic. The recently formed [Georgia Developmental Disabilities Network](#) (GDDN) is a body made up of ten Georgia-based organizations focusing on the disability community. The network was established in response to COVID-19, and it provides people with resources to navigate a variety of challenges, including employment. Ultimately, the GDDN is meant to support advocates and align agencies as they deal with unprecedented times. The EFC, as a legislatively mandated body, also connects the leaders of various agencies to prioritize employment.

Recently, GCDD partnered with [GreenWorker Cooperatives](#) and graduated three teams through a program designed to expose young

entrepreneurs to the worker-owned cooperative business model.

In the past, GVRA programs have been criticized for focusing resources on pre-vocational services. Crandell says that this doesn't track with most people's lived experience: they just want to work.

“Our system is set up to reinforce providers to continually tell us why the person can't go to work and needs more funded services prior to that,” Crandell said. “It just doesn't mirror how Americans go to work. We get fired. We take a job we don't like. We work early and work often ... I think that the struggle is to get the funded system of disability employment to look much more like what naturally happens if you don't have a label.”

WE GET FIRED. WE TAKE A JOB WE DON'T LIKE ... I THINK THAT THE STRUGGLE IS TO GET THE FUNDED SYSTEM OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT TO LOOK MUCH MORE LIKE WHAT NATURALLY HAPPENS IF YOU DON'T HAVE A LABEL.



Wells speaks on the past failures of GVRA with thoughtfulness and a positive energy. At the end of the day, he hopes that communicating with individuals in the community and using the current climate to reflect on the agency's areas of improvement will lead to meaningful change. “We are opening up our voices, and we're opening up our ears, our eyes, in order to leverage the



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) 2020. This year marks its 75th observance, as well as the 30th anniversary of the ADA.

resources we have, along with our agency partners, to ensure that we're moving everybody in the right direction,” said Wells.

State agencies and many organizations have largely decided moving forward that the right direction is towards competitive, integrated employment. Hong says this is vital, but people need to get creative and remember they're speaking with individuals. Everyone has unique aspirations, and the path forward isn't always obvious. “We can't have a system where one size fits all; it doesn't. It doesn't really exist,” she said.

Ultimately, efforts to better empower and support people with disabilities on a path to employment must be mutable and human-centered to be effective. A rise in micro-enterprise and entrepreneurship could potentially help solve the underemployment crisis, but it could also make the world

a more textured and joyous place. Salam hasn't been able to professionally DJ since March, but he's found ways to pour himself into his radio work and create new content. Either way, the business means more to him than profit.

“For me, work is loving my space, loving my time and using those to the best of my ability to make the world a better place,” said Salam. “So, it's not really about how much I make in terms of dollars, the money. It is not about how much I make, you know, in figures. It's about how much impact I'm able to make on people and society at large. That gives me more joy than making money for someone else.”



[Check out videos of our entrepreneurs' stories.](#)



What's Happening in Washington?

Federal Disability Policy Updates

By Alison Barkoff and Erin Shea,
Center for Public Representation

These past few months have seen a number of starts and stops in negotiations on a new Congressional COVID-19 relief package, and we expect a busy fall ahead as this Congress wraps up.

COVID-19 Response:

Congressional Response:

Congress passed three COVID-19 relief bills and an interim bill early this spring. In May, the House passed a new relief package, the HEROES Act, which included many disability priorities, most importantly, additional funding for the home and community-based services (HCBS) on which many people with disabilities rely. However, the Senate declined to consider the HEROES Act and instead, Senate Republicans released their own proposals, the HEALS Act in July and the “skinny bill” in early September.

[Read more about disability-related provisions included in the COVID-19 relief packages passed by Congress.](#)

Both proposals fail to include disability priorities, like HCBS funding. They also contain “liability shields” that would give any business, nonprofit, school or medical provider immunity from

liability for significant harm related to COVID-19 in many cases.

This would threaten the safety of people with disabilities and older adults in congregate settings; make it easier for employers to escape liability for discrimination and safety violations in the workplace; and allow businesses to refuse to accommodate people with disabilities.

The Senate failed to pass the “skinny bill” in a vote in late September and negotiations appeared dead. But on October 1, the House passed a revised version of the HEROES Act. The bill includes increased funding for Medicaid and HCBS, as well as enhanced unemployment insurance; another round of recovery rebates; and funding for education, housing and food assistance. Negotiations between House leadership and the White House are continuing, but it remains unclear if or when the

[Find more updates and details on the legislative proposals for COVID-19 relief package here.](#)



Senate will take up any new bill. For the latest updates and what you can do to ensure any future coronavirus relief bill includes disability priorities, check out our [advocacy page](#).

Medical Rationing: We've previously discussed efforts to address disability discrimination in access to medical care during COVID-19, including complaints CPR and partners have filed with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In August, OCR [announced](#) a resolution in response to a complaint [filed](#) by CPR and partners alleging that Utah's Crisis Standard of Care Guidelines illegally excluded certain people with disabilities from accessing life-saving treatment like ventilators and deprioritized others based on their disabilities.

The resolution for the first time makes clear that hospitals must provide information on the full scope of available treatment alternatives and cannot steer people towards or condition treatment on “do not resuscitate” (DNR) policies. It also weighs in on the discriminatory

impact of a number of other provisions common in many states' rationing plans.

- [Find more on the Utah resolution.](#)
- [Check out our medical rationing page for resources on federal and state advocacy.](#)

Updates on Health Care Policies with Impacts for Georgia:

1332 Waiver: Georgia recently resubmitted an application for a waiver that would allow it to change how many Georgians purchase health insurance. The waiver would allow Georgia to stop using the federal marketplace to enroll Georgians in health insurance without replacing it with a state-based marketplace. Instead, Georgians would enroll in health insurance through insurers themselves or web brokers, which is likely to lead to confusion and coverage losses. GCDD and CPR submitted comments in opposition to the proposal, and we will keep you updated as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) considers Georgia's application.

For more about the 1332 waiver, check [here](#) and [here](#).

Litigation Updates: *United States v. Georgia:*

The Independent Reviewer of the *Olmstead* settlement agreement between Georgia and the Department of Justice (DOJ) recently issued a compliance report. While the scope of the report was limited due to COVID-19, the report discusses areas of progress and concerns in the

adult developmental disabilities (DD) and mental health systems. Concerns regarding the DD system include the impact of recent budget cuts; ongoing issues with support coordination; lack of clinical supports for people with DD and complex medical or behavioral needs; and failure to implement provider corrective action plans.

GAO v. Georgia (GNETS):

This spring, both of the judges overseeing the two lawsuits challenging the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Supports (GNETS) – one brought by DOJ and the other by private advocates including the Georgia Advocacy Office and CPR – denied motions from Georgia attempting to dismiss the cases. Both cases are now in the “discovery” phase, where the parties formally gather information to use in a trial. We are interested in continuing to hear from families and other stakeholders about their experiences with GNETS.

[More information on the GNETS case can be found here.](#)

You can contact the Georgia Advocacy Office by phone at (404) 885-1234 (or toll-free in Georgia at 1-800-537-2329) or by email at info@thegao.org if you have information to share or questions about GNETS.

On the Fall Horizon: Money Follows the Person:

After the coronavirus pandemic hit, the Money Follows the Person (MFP) program, which helps people with disabilities and older adults move out of institutions and into the community, was given another short-term extension

until November 30. On October 1, a larger government funding bill needed to avoid a government shutdown was signed into law to extend current government funding until December 11, including for MFP. This means that any discussion of a long-term or permanent extension, which we had been advocating for throughout this Congress, is unlikely until a new Congress begins in January 2021. Also, in September, CMS announced that states with operational MFP programs, including Georgia, can apply for additional funding that had been allocated by Congress.

Supreme Court Vacancy:

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the author of the majority opinion in *Olmstead v. L.C.* affirming the rights of people with disabilities to live, work and participate in their communities, passed away on September 18. President Trump has nominated Judge Amy Coney Barrett of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals to replace Justice Ginsburg, and the Senate is expected to quickly consider her nomination.

As with all Supreme Court nominations, the disability community is examining her record on issues important to people with disabilities. Of note, Judge Barrett has publicly expressed opposition to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), raising concerns about how she might rule when the Supreme Court hears argument in November. These updates represent only a small portion of what we're working on. For more on our work, visit our website and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

Note: information current as of 10/5/2020

Welcoming Community Dialogue Groups Host Virtual Retreat and Summit

by Jennifer Bosk

Twenty-seven community advocates for inclusion and change from the Real Communities Partnership (RCP) and the Welcoming Communities Dialogues (WCD) groups gathered virtually from August 19 to 21 for their annual retreat.

For those three days, the work centered around their response to a movie called “Why I Write,” a film about bettering one’s community through art and action, developed and produced by the Hearts and Minds Film Initiative and TELEDUCTION.

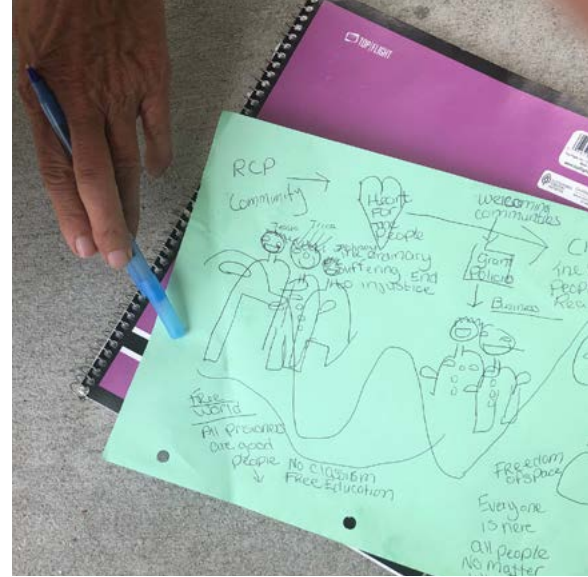
“We were excited to hear the community discussion around the movie and to discover what was familiar to retreat attendees, what was unfamiliar and what was a challenge for some,” said

Malaika Geuka Wells, community organizing coordinator for Global Ubuntu, the organization that manages RCP and WCD.

During the retreat, people were asked to express their vision of what their community would look like within the next five years via art. Using supplies on hand, from paper to magazines to pictures, participants spoke through their art about their hopes and dreams for their communities in achieving the Welcoming Communities’ mission

to pave the way toward an equitable and just society where people across race, ethnicity, culture, class, socioeconomic background, educational status, abilities, gender and religion are treated with dignity and respect.

The retreat was followed by three virtual workshops that helped participants understand the fundamental forces of the current economic and governance



systems; envision a democratic and sustainable future; and strategize toward building a new solidarity economy, which is an economy that is created with people, instead of profit, in mind. These workshops provided an introduction to Highlander’s Mapping Our Futures curriculum, which shares innovative strategies from across the globe that are advancing new economies and shifting the ways groups organize themselves, govern their work together, resist capitalism’s structurally designed inequities and transform people’s lives and conditions.

Using supplies on hand, from paper to magazines to pictures, participants spoke through their art about their hopes and dreams for their communities during the retreat.



OUR GOAL IS TO DESCRIBE SYSTEMS OF INJUSTICE, ROOT OUT AND REMOVE SYSTEMIC ISSUES, AND SUPPLY THE SAFE SPACE TO TALK ABOUT IT.



The workshops focused on Setting the Stage and Community Mapping; Capitalism and the Solidarity Economy; and Beautiful Solutions: Examples of Solidarity Economy.



Last year's summit brought together a diverse group to discuss social justice, disability and race.

Other plans for this Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) initiative included the second annual Welcoming Communities Dialogue Summit on Sept. 26. This year, it was held virtually and targeted social justice, disability and race. Woven throughout the discussions were restorative and healing dialogues led by the Mindfulness with Favor organization. “Our goal is to describe systems of injustice, root out and remove systemic issues, and supply the safe space to talk about it,” said Sumaya Karimi, the project organizing director for RCP and founder and director of Global Ubuntu.

Karimi also explained Global Ubuntu is working to move the focus from the project base of Real Communities where assistance was given to individuals

to fit into their communities to a movement base via the Welcoming Community Movement Fund, adjusting communities to be welcoming and adaptive to all who already live there.

Currently, out of Georgia's **159** counties, Welcoming Communities participate in **10**.

Currently, out of Georgia's 159 counties, the Welcoming Communities Dialogue groups operate in 10 areas across the state. “We plan to expand the movement

and to share best practices for others,” Karimi added. Through the lens of the Welcoming Community Movement Fund, the participants will build and sustain a movement where the culture shifts from one of hate, unfairness and dehumanization to one of love and belonging, where the principle of morality is practiced as the norm.

For more information on this GCDD initiative, please visit the websites of Global Ubuntu and the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The Welcoming Community Dialogues initiative is part of the Real Communities Partnerships, funded by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities and managed by Global Ubuntu.



GCDD Receives Five Year Strategic Plan Feedback from Disability Community

The Five Year Strategic Plan determines how the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) will allocate funding to create systems change for individuals with developmental disabilities and family members through advocacy and capacity building activities.



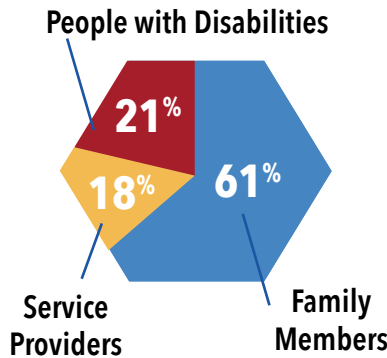
WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

HOW WE REACHED PEOPLE



WHAT THE SURVEYS TOLD US

DEMOGRAPHICS



TOP 3 FOCUS AREAS

1. WAIVER SERVICES
2. EMPLOYMENT
3. HOUSING

TOP 3 BARRIERS

1. KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES
2. WAITLISTS
3. LACK OF MONEY

* Note: 340 surveys were received from 325 unique respondents.

WHAT WERE COMMON THEMES

integrated housing
expanded services in rural areas
technology intersectionality
advocacy training innovation
employment
transportation
advocacy transition planning
eliminate planning list
peer support diversity
coalition building

During the months of August and September, GCDD hosted listening sessions and focus groups to hear from people around the state about what issues mattered to them.

To make sure Georgians with disabilities, their family members, caregivers and community advocates shared what changes they'd like to see in Georgia, GCDD hosted three virtual townhalls; convened six focus groups; and opened a survey to collect detailed information from respondents.

So, what comes next?

With the feedback received, the council will now work to construct the Five Year Strategic Plan based on what we've learned from the community and our work to-date.

GCDD will analyze all the data gathered through focus groups, surveys and townhalls to decipher common themes. GCDD is excited about the powerful and intersectional experiences the community shared openly and candidly. After the review, the council will begin to craft goals across the domains of systems change, capacity building and advocacy where the council is charged with having impact.

If you were not able to participate, the council will collect more feedback on the plan when it is completed and ready for public input in spring 2021. Stay tuned!

Keeping Employment First

by Kate Brady, GCDD Deputy Director

The following is an edited excerpt from the *Expert Update* interview led by the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) on employment for people with disabilities.

Kate Brady: There have been tremendous budget cuts in Georgia, which have resulted in people losing state-funded family support and specifically employment services. I thought I'd first go to Melissa and Nick and hear how you've seen the impact of these cuts play out in your provider organizations.

Nick Perry: I've seen quite a bit. Individuals who recently gained employment have lost the opportunity to have extended supports and services funded as result. Providers who are unable, or possibly unwilling, have found it difficult to support individuals, specifically new clients.

I've seen the creation of a new waiting list through [Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities]' Competitive Integrated Employment program that is allegedly replacing Employment Express (EE). Those funds are very limited, so once they're depleted, there's a pending list the individuals will be placed on.

On a positive note, there are individuals out there seeking employment who have actually gained employment and providers who are still willing to continue supporting those individuals despite the loss of funding. I'm seeing a need for a different funding model.

Kate Brady: Melissa, are there experiences you've had regarding the recent cuts that you'd like to reflect on?

Melissa Rutland: What Nick said is spot on. Family supports for some people

using state-funded services are the only supports they're eligible for. When they lose that, those people are at risk because even though it was limited, it helped them. So, I worry about them because they no longer have funding.

With the change in EE, you have to think about agencies like mine that received vocational rehabilitation (VR) referrals. EE helped agencies because once someone was placed and utilized all the VR funding, they knew they had it to help sustain that person. Agencies that are not in the financial shape that our agency is in cannot carry those people.

But, if you think about the [VR] contract that says if you place someone after you've lost VR funding, you'll cover them for the lifetime of that job with two contacts per month. While my agency might do it, a newer agency or service center that is trying to switch over to community-based services is not going to be able to do that. It's going to be a struggle, and I see that as setting back employment.

Kate Brady: So, Doug, I am particularly interested in your thoughts related to Nick's points around the funding model and how leadership at the state level can put forward a model that aligns with our stated values of employment.

Doug Crandell: Every time we have confusion and uncertainty, you're going to have delays and lose momentum.



VIDEO INTERVIEW: [Watch the complete Expert Update interview here.](#)

We can use that as an excuse forever. Yes, we have to have state cuts, but why you would cut employment supports is beyond me.

There are other models – Tennessee is a great example above us – their CHOICES home and community-based services waiver is the same thing we have. [Georgia waivers] have to be revamped [to align with Tennessee's] for a new generation of young people, for providers that are trying to change over. There has to be an incentive to do that. There has to be flexibility.



Some of those services are benefits counseling, counseling with families or someone who went to a sheltered workshop for decades. Providers, if we're encouraging folks to leave places, we've got to be able to reimburse people.

On the flip side, we also need fidelity, right? It's difficult to achieve Employment First, Community First, if the state and providers can't come to the table and recognize the true spirit of what the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act asks us to do – to totally collaborate and prioritize folks with significant disabilities, getting evidence-based services.

This is a tremendous opportunity to get serious about how we're going to fund true supports for people.

[Read the full transcript here.](#)

EXPERT UPDATE: THE PANELISTS



Kate Brady
Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities



Nick Perry
DeKalb Community Service Board



Melissa Rutland
Diversified Enterprises



Doug Crandell
Institute on Human Development & Disability at UGA; Project Director, Advancing Employment TA Center

When Hobby Becomes Career

by Moira Bucciarelli, Photographer: Haylee Fucini-Lenkey

Nandi – short for Nanditha – is finally home. She has lived in a variety of places, some better than others. Nandi gets emotional as she recalls painful experiences from her group home life – in one instance being told to pack up and move on short notice; in another being confronted and shouted at by a staffer.



Nandi lives happily in her own home in Macon.

These distressing experiences have led Nandi to move back home with her parents at age 35. This time, she moved into a small apartment her architect father built for her. It is just a stone's throw from her parent's simple ranch home and aquaponic garden on a wooded lot outside Macon. Nandi's family paid for all the construction and furnishing of the apartment home.

Nandi is a woman with a visual impairment and Down syndrome who lives in the Macon area. She stands at the doorstep of her very own home, thrilled to have visitors to show around. She starts in the living room, then the kitchen, and then her bedroom. The walls of her bedroom feature beautiful and colorful framed photographs that Nandi has taken – a smiling dolphin and a graceful sailboat. She tells us how she discovered her

talent for photography through a club called the ShutterBugs Club.

Nandi is able to thrive and succeed at home due to the love and dedication of her parents. Her mother spends 20 hours or more per week on Nandi's support, care and advocacy. But Nandi also has a participant direction COMP waiver that allows her 50 hours of caregiver support each week. Having these caregivers allows Nandi to have a vibrant community life where she contributes through meaningful roles. Nandi's mom says about the positive impact of the waiver: "It has vastly improved Nandi's independence, self-determination, ability to work and general quality of life." In addition, her social security disability insurance helps cover her living expenses. If Nandi didn't have these financial resources, she would most likely still be living in a group home or institution.

Thanks to these resources, Nandi has also been able to supplement her income through entrepreneurship. With the encouragement and guidance of her care team, Nandi's interest in photography led her to start her own small business, "Scan with Nan." The scanning business idea is a good fit for Nandi, because, as she admits with a

disarming self-awareness, she "gets distracted easily, especially by TV." At one of her previous jobs that became a problem, as there was often a television on in the background. But at home with her caregiver or her mom, she can focus more easily and take breaks when she needs them.



Nandi's own small business allows her to supplement her income doing something she loves.

WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND GUIDANCE OF HER CARE TEAM, NANDI'S INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY LED HER TO START HER OWN SMALL BUSINESS, "SCAN WITH NAN."



Her caregivers are critical to giving Nandi the support she needs to set goals and allocate time for her scan orders, but also participate in her numerous community and social events. Because Nandi is not all about the business, she spends about 20 hours a month engaged in volunteer and community service. She does public speaking events, where she talks about ways people with developmental disabilities can plan for transitions from school to work or life in the community. She serves on boards and does advocacy work, and recently



The waiver has given us joy to see Nandi able to live her own life and to grow in so many areas.

was hired with the “Living Well Georgia” project for a five-year period. In that role, she will co-train direct support professionals about “supported decision-making.”

Getting the COMP waiver was not an easy or quick process. After years of perseverance, they finally received a letter from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities saying Nandi had been determined eligible for waiver services and was on the waiting list. In 2005, they received the news that would change their lives for the better. “We literally jumped for joy and thanked God when we received the letter saying Nandi was approved to receive services. Unfortunately, from the approval letter to the start of services was

an incredibly long time with more follow ups and jumping through hoops.” It wasn’t until late 2005 or 2006 that Nandi began to receive NOW Medicaid waiver services.

As Nandi’s mom says, “The waiver has given us joy to see Nandi able to live her own life and to grow in so many areas. We have peace in knowing that it is possible for Nandi to live a good life in her dream home. We thank God that she has these wonderful opportunities and experiences.” Thanks to the waiver, Nandi and her business are flourishing. The Isaac’s story demonstrates the perseverance and hope that it takes for families to receive the services and supports they need to thrive.



Nandi is able to thrive and succeed at home due to the love and dedication of her parents (photo at left) and her caregiver (photo above) who is provided by a participant direction COMP waiver.



GCDD’s Storytelling Project paints a picture of the complex systems of support that enable people with developmental disabilities to live their best lives.

Spanning Georgia’s 56 state senate districts, these stories feature at least one individual who resides in each district – allowing this project to become a vehicle of advocacy for Georgians living with disabilities. The stories highlight racial disparities, socioeconomic inequities and how a situation can play out in two different circumstances – one where people are or are not supported by the system.



6,000 Waiting Documentary

6,000 Waiting tells the powerful stories of three Georgians with developmental disabilities whose lives are significantly impacted by the staggering lack and complexity of state Medicaid waiver funding. With persistence, courage and self-determination, they fight to access the resources they desperately need to live life on their own terms. *6,000 Waiting* will premiere this winter and will support GCDD’s 2021 advocacy actions. [You can now watch the trailer here!](#)

In the upcoming months, the storytelling team will host virtual screenings for both private and public audiences. In addition, they will submit *6,000 Waiting* into several film festivals across the state of Georgia. Stay tuned to the [GCDD storytelling page](#) for more details on these screening opportunities.





COMMUNITY CALENDAR

To find more events, visit [GCDD's Calendar of Events](#).

— OCTOBER

October 18, 11 AM - 6 PM
KIDFITSTRONG Fitness Challenge Atlanta Fall Festival

[Register online](#)

October 20, 2 - 3 PM
Advancing Employment Webinar - Employment First in the Era of COVID

[Register for Zoom call](#)

October 31,
10:30 AM - 12:30 PM
Lekotek Halloween Parade

AMS Vans LLC, Tucker, GA
[Find more info on calendar](#)

— NOVEMBER

November 1, All day
The Superhero Project Celebrates ADA30

[Visit the virtual exhibit](#)

November 1 - 8
28th Annual Lekotek Virtual Run/Walk

[Register online](#)

**November 3
ELECTION DAY - DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**

November 5 - 6, 4 - 5 PM
Disability & Rehabilitation Conference 2020 (WDRC)

[Register for Zoom call](#)

November 6, 1 - 3 PM
Path to Housing Georgia Advocacy Office, Decatur, GA
[To register for this FREE class, email \[cmitchell@thegao.org\]\(mailto:cmitchell@thegao.org\)](#)

November 7, 8:30 - 9:30 AM
Sensory Friendly Saturday - Children's Museum of ATL
[Order tickets online](#)

November 10, 2 - 3 PM
Advancing Employment Webinar - Customized Employment in Georgia
[Register for Zoom call](#)

November 13, 6 - 7 PM
Virtual Champion of the Year: Georgia Best Buddies
[RSVP online](#)

November 17, 2 - 3 PM
Advancing Employment Webinar - Finding Perspective
[Register for Zoom call](#)

November 19, 3 - 4 PM
Solving Problems in Social Situations
[Register for Zoom call](#)

November 24, 2 - 5 PM
Sensory Friendly Afternoon - Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History
[Free with admission; RSVP here](#)

— DECEMBER

December 1 - 9
2020 TASH Conference - Virtual Edition
[Information and registration](#)

December 2 - 3
GA Assoc for Positive Behavior Supports (GAPBS) Virtual Conference
[Information and registration](#)



December 3
International Day of People with Disabilities
[Find out more information](#)

December 3, 2 - 5 PM
Sensory Friendly Afternoon - Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History
[Free with admission; RSVP here](#)

December 8, 2 - 3 PM
Advancing Employment Webinar - Self-Employment Initiative
[Register for Zoom call](#)

December 12, 12 - 1 PM
Lunch with Santa
Park Place at Newtown School
[Find more information](#)

December 31
Supported Employment ACRE Training for SE Georgia (Region 5)
[Information and registration](#)

— JANUARY

January 7 - 8, 2021
GCDD Quarterly Council Meeting - Atlanta, GA
[Find more information online](#)