

FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR
FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2008

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In the second year of its five-year plan, the Council's efforts have had a positive impact in the areas of employment, health care, inclusion, skill development and transition for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Community Living and Service Coordination Task Force

Self - Advocacy Grassroots Project

The Council's grassroots self-advocacy project, begun in 2007, successfully assisted individuals with disabilities in developing three self-advocacy groups around Florida. The project developed a "Tool Kit", which was designed to be the foundation for training and technical assistance. Leaders from each of the three sites participated in a two-day intensive Self Advocacy Institute Training workshop.

Each group was awarded a grant in the amount of \$4,000 to support start-up and continuation needs for up to an eighteen-month period. Initial face-to-face follow-up technical assistance was provided to each group by project staff. There are plans to expand the project to include two more self-advocacy groups.

Disaster Guide

The Council, working with Volunteer Florida, developed a user-friendly emergency preparedness guide for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. The guide includes up-to-date information about emergency planning methods and strategies, emergency management, disaster supply kits, evacuation, communication, and the importance of personal support networks. A blank "Personal Disaster Plan" was included as the last section of the guide so that readers could create their own personal disaster plans. The guide was distributed statewide.

Education and Child Development Task Force

Project Search

This is a one-year educational program for students with disabilities in their last year of high school. It is targeted for students whose main goal is competitive employment. The program takes place in a healthcare or business setting where total immersion in the workplace creates an environment for the teaching and learning processes to function through continuous feedback and application of new skills.

This high school transition program is a worksite-based, school-to-work program that provides training in independent living, employability skills and specific job skills for high school students. Through the efforts of the Project Search initiative, five pilot sites have been set up in Florida. These efforts included assisting pilot sites in start-up activities with particular emphasis

on identifying and establishing business partners, providing technical assistance and support, as well as monitoring and evaluating pilot sites. This initiative trained forty-two students with disabilities. Three employers provided vocational supports to students on the job.

Early Care and Education Inclusion Coordinator

The Early Learning Coalition of Pinellas County, Inc., working with Early Steps (Florida's early intervention system for infants and toddlers), Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas, Inc., Pinellas County Schools, Florida Diagnostic Learning Resources System (FDLRS) and Gulf Coast Associate Center, developed a program for a network of early care and education providers in the Pinellas County area. This network provided training and technical support to five early education/child care sites in Pinellas County, teaching them how to practice successful inclusion of children with developmental disabilities. Activities included classroom instruction, phone calls, visits, and field trips. More than 50 percent of participating teachers reported that they felt more confident working with children with disabilities following the training. This training and technical assistance will continue during 2009.

IDEA Workshops

In 2004, Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), with implementing rules promulgated in 2006. Understanding these changes, along with the "No Child Left Behind" law, is essential for students with developmental disabilities and their families or guardians in order to obtain improved educational services. In addition, parents and guardians need to become familiar with the most appropriate methods for advocating on behalf of their children with the teacher, school and district personnel.

The Council contracted with Peter W. Wright, Esq., whose law practice is devoted to assisting persons with disabilities and their parents, families or guardians, to present four workshops around the state, designed to inform parents, families or guardians of their family members' educational rights under the law, and how to advocate on behalf of those family members. Workshops included special education law, rights and responsibilities, tests and measurements to measure progress and regression, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and an introduction to tactics and strategies for effective advocacy. Over 500 individuals attended the four workshops.

Employment Task Force

Micro Enterprise

The micro-enterprise project was designed to provide training and technical assistance to individuals with developmental disabilities who wanted to start their own businesses. Ten individuals received the training, and four of these individuals have been successful in maintaining their businesses to date. These include an internet business selling low-priced computer and electronic merchandise, a medical billing services business, a website development, design and hosting service, and a jack-of-all-trades business that offers services and supports to local small businesses.

Health Care/Prevention Task Force

APD Waitlist Study

According to the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS), an on-going survey affiliated with the United States Census Bureau, more than 2.6 million Floridians are living with a disability, including individuals with a diagnosis of mental retardation (intellectual disability), autism, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, or Prader-Willi syndrome. ACS is sent to a sample of the population which tells what the population looks like, how it lives and helps communities determine where to locate services and allocate resources.

At the time of the study, approximately 17,000 Floridians eligible to receive waiver-funded services through the Florida Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) are on a wait list for these services. To understand the immediate and long-term needs of individuals with developmental disabilities on the wait list, the Council commissioned a survey of individuals on the APD wait list who are living in their own home or their family home. They found that:

- 19.3% of individuals with developmental disabilities under age 21 and 48.2% of individuals with developmental disabilities age 21 and older received no services at the time of the survey.
- Individuals with developmental disabilities under age 21 most often needed behavioral analysis (44.7%), speech therapy (41.4%), and occupational therapy (38.3%).
- Individuals with developmental disabilities age 21 and older most often needed transportation (46.0%), in-home supports (36.3%), speech therapy (29.5%), and occupational therapy (29.0%).
- 70.3% of individuals with developmental disabilities under age 21 reported receiving services through their school, the most common source of services for this age group. These individuals will lose their school-based services by age 22.

When individuals with developmental disabilities leave their current homes, they and their caregivers plan to consider a variety of housing options, including:

- Moving the individuals with developmental disabilities into their own homes (21.8%)
- Moving the individuals with developmental disabilities in with other family members or friends (28.3%)
- Moving the individuals with developmental disabilities into a home with assisted living services (31.2%), and
- Moving the individuals with developmental disabilities into a group home or other residential facility (29.7%).

Redefining Medical Necessity

One of the Council's best health care initiatives during 2008 was the "Redefining Medical Necessity" project, which reviewed the definition of medical necessity as used for persons with developmental disabilities and recommended possible modifications to the criteria used in

determining medical necessity. These recommendations included changes regarding the use of medical necessity in Florida and provided a discussion of the barriers and opportunities to changing the state's system.

Special Projects

Florida Youth Leadership Forum

The Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) is an annual career and leadership training program that is both educational and motivational for high school students with disabilities. The 2007 YLF was held in Tallahassee and brings together young people with disabilities who demonstrate leadership potential and helps prepare them for the future. By serving as delegates from their communities, students with disabilities cultivate leadership, citizenship and social skills.

The Florida Youth Leadership Forum offered peers with common challenges and experiences the opportunity to learn from one another. The Forum included educational programs that cover topics such as the history of the disability movement, personal leadership plans, career opportunities, and academic and community resources. Delegates learned leadership by example through meetings with disability community leaders, business professionals and government dignitaries.

In addition, social and recreational opportunities enabled delegates to network and learn from each other. Participating students had the opportunity to hear from a number of speakers, the vast majority of whom also have disabilities, who covered topics such as academic and career options, self-advocacy, community resources such as technology and independent living, volunteerism and personal leadership. Students had the opportunity to meet community leaders and attend a Mentors Luncheon to network with adults with disabilities and learn what can be accomplished as career goals. All delegates developed specific action plans for their personal leadership development that they can use to help them prepare for life after high school.

Inclusion Summit

The "Inclusion Summit" was a meeting between eighty self-advocates, family members, and professionals and national experts to consider inclusion practices, identify barriers, and develop a plan for action to help move Florida forward with the goal of full inclusion for all. Inclusion Summit participants developed a strategic plan, "Inclusion Now", which recognized that people with disabilities have the same hopes and aspirations as their non-disabled peers to live, learn, work, play and participate in life experiences and responsibilities as valued members of the community. An "Inclusion Now" Communication Plan was produced which included an Inclusion NOW DVD, brochure, presentation speaking points, and handouts.

Voter Guide

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities produced "Voting in Florida—A Guide for Citizens with Disabilities".

This booklet explained why it's important to vote, how to register to vote, and the many different

ways to vote. Over 4,000 copies were distributed prior to the November 2008 election.

Asset Development

In March 2006, the Council sponsored the first ever “Asset Development Summit” in the nation to focus on asset development for persons with developmental disabilities. Working with the National Disability Institute, the Council adopted an action plan entitled “A Florida Roadmap to a Better Economic Future for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families”.

In the second year of this project, this initiative led to local Asset Summits in Leon County and Orange County. In addition, one school district was selected to expand financial literacy for students with disabilities. This initiative also provided information on the Social Security Administration’s revisions to the “Ticket to Work” program, coordinated questions and answers sessions with the Internal Revenue Service to better understand the economic Stimulus Payments, and conducted a workshop on Asset Development for students with disabilities at a conference in Palm Beach County.

Partners in Policymaking

Partners in Policymaking (PIP) is a leadership and advocacy training program sponsored by the Council that teaches self-advocates and family members how to be community leaders and obtain the best available services for themselves and others.

Participants generally attend a series of two-day training sessions over a year, covering a variety of topics on disability policy and practice, such as disability history, early intervention, public education services, adult services, and family support.

During 2008, the Council supported the training of 23 individuals in the PIP program, two of whom were self-advocates. PIP graduates participate in many Council activities, including conducting workshops at state-wide conferences for individuals with disabilities and their families, and developing grassroots advocacy organizations.