

FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL, INC. ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR FISCAL YEAR ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

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In the third 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 eight self-advocacy groups around Florida. During a statewide leadership meeting of the eight groups, each one received a \$1,000 grant to support them for up to 18 months.

Transportation Guide

Community transportation services can meet a wide range of needs for persons with disabilities, allowing them to participate fully in their communities and do everyday things such as go to work, go shopping, visit friends, attend church or go to doctor appointments. To provide individuals with disabilities with more information about transportation services in Florida, the Council contracted for the development of a user-friendly transportation guide for persons with developmental disabilities and their families.

"Let's Go!" lists available transportation options for each of Florida's 67 counties as well as general information about federal and state transportation programs that serve individuals with disabilities. The guide also provides examples of how to go about planning a trip on public transportation, as well as information about the local special needs registry, which assists individuals with disabilities with emergency-preparedness transportation planning.

This guide was prepared to make it easier to find transportation programs that address specific needs. It provides county-by-county transportation information, including specific services available in each county, as well as contact information for the various agencies that manage transportation services in Florida. The guide is also available on disc and will be translated into Spanish.

Child Development and Education Task Force

Inclusive Recreation

The Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA), through a grant from the Council, is providing training to recreation providers regarding the benefits of inclusion. Staff from the City of Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department and the Capital Region YMCA has attended the training. The program includes resources of inclusive recreation adaptive devices, disability awareness activities, and the benefits of recreation.

Through the grant the Council also provided funds for the FDOA to purchase an accessible ramp which was installed at the Tallahassee YMCA pool during the Summer of 2009, which allows individuals with disabilities who use a wheelchair or other mobility device, elderly individuals, and others to access the pool.

Project Discover

This project focuses on career preparation at the school district level to train educators on vocational assessments to discover the interests, skills and work values of students with developmental disabilities.

Project Discover trained educators on a new model for vocational assessment, supported students to reach their employment goals, provided employment training to 38 teachers, school district personnel and supported employment coaches. This resulted in 32 employers providing career experience works sites for the participating students. A Discovery Resource Guide is being developed that will provide educators guidance on how Project Discover has unfolded, as well as how Project Discover can be implemented in other school districts.

IDEA Workshops

The workshops, sponsored by the Council, brought noted lawyer and author Peter Wright to Florida to present his Wrightslaw Special Education and Advocacy Workshop. During the four statewide workshops, over 600 individuals were trained in how to advocate for better services for persons with developmental disabilities who are in the state's school system. Those trained included self-advocates, parents/guardians, school district personnel, attorneys and others.

Employment Task Force

The Council has made significant progress toward its goal of providing competitive, integrated employment opportunities and developing a range of customized employment services for individuals with disabilities. These include:

Project Search is a work-based program that provides training in independent living, employability skills and specific job skills.

This program is offered to high school students as a school-to-work program, and to adults, post-graduation. Twenty-five individuals have gained employment as a direct result of this effort.

The Florida Asset Development Project was created to assist individuals with disabilities to create wealth and expand assets. This project provided training for 545 individuals, with the Agency for Persons with Disabilities providing \$55,000 for part of the incentive training.

The Supported Competitive Employment Training Team, managed by the University of South Florida, expanded customized employment opportunities through training and technical assistance to a variety of entities across the state.

Health Care/Prevention Task Force

The large number of youth and young adults with disabilities transitioning from pediatric to adult health care is a relatively new phenomenon. Due to advances in technology, we are witnessing dramatic increases in survival rates among children with serious conditions and diseases. For example, in the 1970s, less than 30% of children born with spina bifida reached age 20. Today, more than 80% reach adulthood.

Despite our understanding about the importance of a smooth, uninterrupted “hand-off” from pediatric to adult care, research suggests there has been little investment in service systems that meet the needs of these emerging adults. According to the *2005/2006 National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs*, only 41% of youth with special health care needs in the U.S. receive the services they need for transition to adult health care, work, and independence. In Florida, the news is even worse: less than 34% receive needed services statewide, and only 16% of those in rural areas receive services.

In response to this emerging need, the Council initiated a Health Care Transition Strategic Planning Initiative. Simultaneously, Florida advocates initiated a call to action during the 2008 legislative session, which established a statewide Task Force to assess the need for health care transition services, develop strategies to ensure successful transition from pediatric to adult health care, and identify existing and potential funding sources.

Through a collaboration between the Florida Department of Health, Children’s Medical Services (CMS), and the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, a 35-member Task Force met from August to December 2008 via teleconference and face-to-face meetings to develop and submit their report to Governor Crist and the Legislature. The result was the task force report: “Ensuring Successful Transition from Pediatric to Adult Health Care,” which outlined 16 recommendations to build a comprehensive system of care for the estimated 500,000 young people ages 12-24 with disabilities or chronic health conditions living in Florida.

Key recommendations from the Task Force are to establish a State Office of Health Care Transition within Children’s Medical Services that guides and supports regional public/private coalitions; develop educational programs and materials for youth and their families to help them prepare for health care transition; provide training for health care and education professionals; and advocate for adequate financing of health care services. During 2010, the Council will be funding efforts to implement the recommendations of this report.

Special Projects

Community Partnerships

The Council has partnered with many other advocacy groups, including **The Governor's Commission on Disabilities, Volunteer Florida, The Governor's Task Force on Autism, and The Partnership for Work**, to improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Working to strengthen community partnerships, the Council awarded a grant to **The Infants and Young Children of West Central Florida, Inc.**, to offer a series of trainings to parents and providers to increase their knowledge and skills and to enhance the development and quality of life for infants and young children with special needs.

The Council also participated in two state-wide workgroups, one to improve outcomes for young children and the second to improve inclusion of children with disabilities in child care.

Focusing on support to low-income, minority and individuals living in rural areas, the Council provided financial assistance to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to attend conferences and trainings where they learned more about disability issues and advocacy.

The Council provided part of the funding for a state-wide conference sponsored by the **Down Syndrome Association of Central Florida, Inc.** The two-day conference included state-of-the-art information and best practices for children and adults with Down Syndrome, their families and those who serve them. The Conference included a series of workshops covering such subjects as Health Needs, Case Management and Management of Resources, a Best Practices Symposium on Community Inclusion, a Policy Development Symposium, and several workshops for young adults with Down Syndrome.

Florida Youth Leadership Forum

The Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), now in its tenth year, is an annual career and leadership training program that is both educational and motivational for high school students with disabilities. The 2009 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.

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.

23 new advocates graduated in November 2009 after attending 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 2009, PIP graduates participated in many Council activities, including conducting workshops at state-wide conferences for individuals with disabilities and their families, and developing grassroots advocacy organizations.