

FLORIDA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

To advocate and promote meaningful participation in all aspects of life for Floridians with developmental disabilities.

E-Newsletter – Spring 2009

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day

Over 100 individuals came to Tallahassee to celebrate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day 2009 at the Capitol on Tuesday, March 24. Events included a press conference with Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp and over a dozen exhibits tables featuring informational items relating to disabilities. Lt. Governor Kottkamp told the crowd of over 100 who crowded the second floor rotunda in the Capitol that he and Governor Charlie Crist support the needs of people with developmental disabilities and will do all they can to see that services are not cut.



Self-advocates Frank Shallet, Casey Stewart and Idelio Valdes meet with Representative Kelly Skidmore on Developmental Disabilities Awareness



Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp talks with self-advocate Garrett Mayersohn during Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day while FDDC Chair Susan Gold

Governor Charlie Crist had proclaimed it “Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day,” and it was an important opportunity to focus attention on the challenges, opportunities and issues facing Floridians with developmental disabilities. Self-advocates and their family members were joined by service providers, support organizations, Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp, Agency for Persons with Disabilities Director Jim DeBeaugrine, Representative Franklin Sands and other leaders gathered on the Second Floor Capitol Rotunda to support and champion the cause of people with developmental disabilities

Dr. Susan Gold, Council Chair, welcomed those attending, then introduced Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, who presented a proclamation naming March 24, 2009, as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day. The Lt. Governor told the crowd that Governor Crist had asked lawmakers to set aside \$61 million to help reduce the number of individuals currently on the Developmental Services Waiver Program wait list. He also encouraged those attending DD Day to speak with their legislators, as that is the most effective way to spread their message. Rep. Franklin Sands said lawmakers need to close some of the state's tax loopholes to help fund human services needs.

Before and after the press conference, self-advocates, family members, service providers and others travelled throughout the Capitol, meeting with lawmakers and asking for their support in funding human services programs.

Exhibitors at DD Awareness Day included: Agency For Persons With Disabilities (APD), Advocacy Center, Able Trust, Bureau of Exceptional Education & Student Services/ Clearinghouse Information, Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST), Family Network Disabilities of Florida, Inc., Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC), Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA), Vocational Rehabilitation, The Family Café, Delmarva Foundation, The Florida Youth Council (FYC), Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (ARF), ARC of Florida, Self-Advocacy Project, Sunrise Community, Inc. and Mactown, Inc.

Go to www.fddc.org to see a photo slide show from DD Awareness Day.

Florida's People, Florida's Promise

It was freezing cold, but that didn't stop over 35 people from showing up at the Capitol to ask lawmakers for more dollars for human services programs. Shivering at times, several in the crowd held up signs reading "SOS – Save Our Services for Florida's most Vulnerable", and in a plug for raising the cigarette tax, one woman displayed her feelings with a poster proclaiming - "No Butts About It - Reduce Healthcare Risks and Costs".

A broad range of advocates, representing millions of Floridians of all ages and in many circumstances, gathered at the Capitol on March 4, 2009, to urge legislators to reject a "stimulus shell game" with federal aid dollars. The groups also asked lawmakers to enact long-term solutions to put the state back on track for a brighter future.

"We're concerned that Florida may use stimulus funds to displace state funds previously earmarked for health and human services," said Lori Parham, AARP's Florida state director. "This budget recommendation, if adopted, would create a stimulus 'shell game.' Floridians already have seen this kind of substitution before, when Florida enacted the state lottery. The lottery's billions went into education – but other dollars were withdrawn from education and diverted."

David Bundy, president and CEO of Children's Home Society of Florida, said that, even with the recently enacted stimulus package, Florida needs long-term revenue solutions that create a stable future for the state.

"In recent days, several legislators championed the need to review all sources of revenue, as well as a meaningful study of existing sales tax exemptions," Bundy said. "We applaud these bold leadership initiatives and urge their broader support in the legislature."

The groups also urged lawmakers to consider a broad range of revenue solutions. Leaders of the groups noted that even though recent federal aid will help ease the state's immediate budget crisis, Florida needs lasting revenue solutions that will bolster the state's economy and make the state an attractive place to live.

AARP Florida State Director Parham laid out three revenue solutions that AARP is asking lawmakers to consider. She noted these solutions, if adopted, would help address both short-term and long-term fiscal crises:

- A \$1 per pack increase in the state cigarette tax. Studies indicate that this increase would help reduce smoking by an estimated 7.5 percent, save lives, reduce future health-care costs and also raise as much as \$700 million in badly needed state revenue.
- Review state sales tax exemptions periodically. The state exempts more transactions from state sales tax than are subject to tax, creating more than \$24 billion in exemptions annually.
- Joining a national compact to encourage collection of state sales tax on purchases made via the Internet, catalog sales or telephone hotlines. If federal action also is taken, the move could bring in as much as \$3.2 billion annually.

At the Capitol along with the AARP and the Children's Home Society were the Florida Coalition for Children, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, the Florida Health Care Association, the Florida Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association, the Academy of Florida Elder Law Attorneys, the Florida Council on Aging, the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans, Partnership for Strong Families, Florida CHAIN, the Florida Public Interest Research Group and the Florida Center for Fiscal and Tax Reform. Collectively, the groups speak on behalf of millions of Floridians.



Lori Parham, AARP's state director, addresses those gathered at the Capitol for the Florida's People, Florida's Promise rally on March 4, 2009.



Debra Dowds, Executive Director of the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, talks with a reporter from Florida Public Radio after the Florida's People Florida's Promise rally.

ARC Rally



ARC Florida Executive Director Deborah Linton (left), FDDC Public Policy Coordinator Margaret Hooper (center) and APD Director Jim DeBeaugrine (right) at the ARC Florida Rally on Wednesday, March 18th 2009 at the Capitol . Over 500 individuals, from Miami to Pensacola, converged on Capitol to advocate for the needs of Florida's citizens with developmental disabilities.

Letter from the Director



Wow – we have seen many exciting things happen during the past few months. We are proud to announce that the Human Services Research Institute has completed its strategic plan for moving forward with improving the lives of Floridians with developmental disabilities. You can read all about it in “A Strategic Path Forward” Responding to the Needs of People with Developmental Disabilities in Florida”. Copies are available by contacting the Council at 1-800-580-7801 or going to our website at www.fddc.org and downloading a copy.

The Council is now a member of Florida’s People Florida’s Promise, a group of over 100 advocates representing literally millions of Floridians of all ages and conditions, who are urging Florida’s lawmakers to enact long-term solutions to the state’s fiscal woes and to stop balancing the budget on the backs of Florida’s most vulnerable citizens. On Wednesday, March 4, a group of about 35 individuals representing the various organizations that make up Florida’s People Florida’s Promise held a press conference at the Capitol to urge lawmakers not to use federal stimulus money to fund health and human services programs and to restore the cuts made during the last legislative session to health care and human services. I was there – it was cold - but it was encouraging to see so many advocates. (Please go to Florida’s People Florida's Promise (Make Florida's People Florida's Promise a link) to read the full story of the press conference.) The Council – working with Volunteer Florida – produced a “Disaster Ready – Emergency Preparedness Guide for Floridians with Disabilities”. You can download a copy by going to our website or you can order a copy by calling the Council office at 850-488-4180. Get yours before hurricane seasons starts.

Finally, the Council elected new officers during their December 2008 quarterly meeting - Susan Gold, Chair; Jacquelyn Needelman, Co-Chair and Steve Howells, Treasurer. The new officers will serve until 2010.

For more information about the Council and to learn about upcoming events and conference, go to the Council website at www.fddc.org and click on “News and Alerts” in the left-hand column on the home page.

Sincerely,

Debra Dowds

Executive Director

Self –Advocates Are on the Move

The numbers of Florida’s self advocates have increased dramatically thanks to a grant from the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. The Council’s grassroots self-advocacy project, begun in 2007, successfully assisted individuals with disabilities in developing ten self-advocacy groups around Florida.

Self-advocacy is about independent groups of people with disabilities working together, learning how to make decisions and choices on their own, learning their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and speaking up for what they believe in.

The self-advocacy movement in Florida began more than 30 years ago in 1975 when the Florida Legislature passed the “Bill of Rights for Retarded Persons”, which required individuals with disabilities to be involved in the planning their own lives. The first self-advocacy group in the state was “People First”, begun in Miami in 1979. Today, there are 10 groups around the state.

Abilities Venti – Pembroke Pines

Central Florida Self-Determination Advocacy Council – Orlando

Elephant Herds – Panama City

Fort Myers Group

Live Oak Self-Advocates

Palm Beach County Group

People First of South Florida – Broward County Chapter, Dade County Chapter

Self-Advocates of East Volusia – Daytona Beach

Stand Up for Independence – Martin County

SunCoast Self-Advocates – Tampa

The goals of Florida's self-advocates are to network with other self-advocates throughout the state and provide resources to give self-advocates a voice in the decisions and issue that affect their lives.

Several self-advocates, including Frank Shallett (President of the Broward Chapter of People First of South Florida), Idelio Valdes, Council member, and Casey Stewart, Council member, came to the Capitol for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day and met with several lawmakers to discuss how to get more money for human services programs. Frank also spoke during the Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day press conferences. Click here to read Frank's remarks. (Make this last sentence a link to Frank's remarks).

For more information about the Grassroots Self-Advocacy Groups go to <http://www.floridaselfadvocacy.com>

FDDC and FDOA fund accessible ramp for Tallahassee YMCA.

Children with disabilities who use a wheelchair or other mobility devices will soon be able to access the pool at the Capital Region YMCA located at 2001 Apalachee Parkway. A new ramp has been installed through a partnership with the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association (FDOA) and a grant through Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC).

Children will be able to start using the ramp at a dedication scheduled for Friday, March 27th from 10:00 am – 12:00 noon. Local children including students from Gretchen Everhart School will be enjoying the pool through the use of the new ramp. Members of the disability community and local officials will be on hand to dedicate the ramp. Light refreshments will be provided.

The FDDC recreation inclusion grant awarded to the FDOA provides training to recreation providers regarding the benefits of inclusion. Staff from the City of Tallahassee – Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs 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.

The Capital Region YMCA has always provided opportunities for individuals with disabilities, now with the addition of the ramp, access to the pool will be with more ease. “Inclusion in recreation is a focus for our community. People of all ages and all abilities deserve to receive the health benefits, friendships and feeling of well-being that come from participating in recreation. People with disabilities may use adaptive equipment or something similar to the new ramp at the YMCA, but they CAN participate,” stated Laurie LoRe-Gussak, Executive Director of the Florida Disabled Outdoors Association.

Photos

Direct readers to slide show on website

Grassroots Members Spread the Message



During the past decade in Florida, disability advocacy groups have grown increasingly influential - thanks to the collaborative efforts of disparate groups who share the same policy goals, and who have been influential in bringing the faces and

voices of individuals with disabilities to the attention of Florida's policymakers.

The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) has been instrumental in this movement, and this past summer, the FDDC took another step toward promoting full inclusion in community life for persons with disabilities by establishing seven grassroots coalitions around the state, led by seven "Inclusion Ambassadors".

These individuals, including Partners in Policymaking graduates, family members of individuals with disabilities, and other advocates, met in Tallahassee, Florida, in July 2008 for a one-day training session on how spread the message of inclusion to lawmakers, the media and the general public.

The Inclusion Ambassadors are now working on building membership in their individual coalitions, educating and influencing lawmakers on the need for increased funding for programs and services for persons with disabilities, and getting increased media coverage for the issues affecting persons with disabilities. Each ambassador has a deep commitment to inclusion of persons with disabilities and to seeing that services and programs for these individuals are fully funded by Florida's lawmakers.

The seven leaders are receiving on-going training, support and technical assistance from FDDC staff on how to expand their membership base, talk with and influence lawmakers, and educate the media on disability-related issues. Each local coalition reflects the strengths and needs of that region.

Ambassadors are required to make periodic reports on the success of their inclusion efforts. They report on the number of face-to-face meetings with lawmakers, the success of those meetings, their interactions with the media, and the steps they have taken to expand their coalitions. The FDDC will be using incentive monies to ensure the continued growth and success of these grassroots coalitions.

Dare to Dream

By Karen Pelham



During the 2008 National Association on Councils on Developmental Disabilities Annual Conference in Milwaukee, participants met a courageous and talented young man, LeDerick Horne. LeDerick gripped the hearts and minds of the audience as he shared his personal stories of challenges, frustrations, growth and successes.

*Dare to Dream
By LeDerick Horne*

*...I'll use these sticky fingers
to pick the pocket of
self-determination,
And if I got to grand-theft auto
the Mercedes-Benz
of a quality-education,
then they might as well leave the doors
unlocked
and the keys in the ignition
'cause I'm gone in 60 seconds
and ain't NOTHING, and I mean NOTHING
standing in my way
You see, it's my job
to unlock doors
unshackle minds
break through glass ceilings
motivate, inspire, and challenge you,
-I'm here to challenge you.
...And so I dare you,
- To judge yourselves by a different
standard,
to lift as you climb,
to fight like gladiators
to become master and commander
of your own beautiful minds.
And above all else,
I date you to dream - dare to dream y'all.*

LeDerick spent most of his time in school believing he did not have much of a future and that he would never be able to go to college or pursue a meaningful career.

In the third grade, LeDerick was diagnosed as neurologically impaired, the stated reason for his inability to read or perform math.

The label crippled his self-esteem as a student. But, in the challenging academic environment at Middlesex County College, and with the support

offered for his disability through Project Connections, a Learning Disabilities Resource Program at the College, LeDerick became an outstanding student, compiling a 3.75 grade point average. He transferred to New Jersey City University and graduated with honors from NJCU in 2003.

Since graduation LeDerick has become the head of his own real estate investment company called Horne & Associates, LLC. LeDerick has also been appointed Board Chair of Project Eye-To-Eye, a national nonprofit that provides mentoring programs for students labeled LD/ADHD. Over the past few years LeDerick has become a nationally recognized motivational speaker and advocate for people with disabilities. He now uses his poetic talent to help empower and educate people who attend his presentations, including students, teachers and service providers.

LeDerick Horne wrote a poem, "Dare to Dream", which challenges status quo, bigotry, and complacency. He challenges and assures the learning disabled student...it states, in part...

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