

## # 88 Legislative Update, Advocacy, Media, Fundraising and More!

Dearest Advocates:

I'm sure you have noticed that you have not been receiving as many newsletters recently from me. Unfortunately, my entire family (including myself) has had a storm of medical issues. I've decided to try to pace myself and not send out as many newsletters over the next few months (especially during the summer) in order for me to have more time to focus on my family and health concerns. I'm know you understand. Please continue to send me updates/happenings, etc **BUT** please be patient on how quickly I'm able to distribute out the information. I realize this is going to be a long newsletter so Happy reading!

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First of all the FY 2010 legislative session was completed on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. Unfortunately, there was more low lights than highlights. Due to the economic downturn, it has affected everyone including the disability community.

My brief legislative overview:

### **Good News:**

1. **NO** nurses were cut from the schools! (At the beginning of the legislative session, the Governor had proposed cutting all school nurses in the public school system for an estimated \$30 million savings) This was due to everyone's advocacy efforts!!! Thank you!
2. Autism insurance bills (SB 161) are going to have a study committee formed this year to evaluate the options. More awareness was brought to Autism in the legislator this year.
3. There was an increase in funding for the Special Needs School Voucher Scholarship (SB 10) - \$5.9 Million.
4. Formation of a new Dept. of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities by 7/1/09 (not sure what the true impact will be on families. I hope to see this as an opportunity for positive change in GA).
5. Because of the Federal agreement to implement the Money Follows the Person grant, \$3.5M was funded for 150 Developmental Disability waiver slots and 100 Independent Care Waiver slots so that people with physical and developmental disabilities could transition into community supports living from nursing home and institutional care.
6. It was a victory that we did not see rate cuts for disability providers throughout the budget process.

### **Bad News:**

1. **NO** new COMP/NOW home and community based Disability Waiver slots for FY 2010 (even with all the wonderful advocacy efforts. We will need to advocate for change due to our very long waiting lists in Georgia).
2. Reduction in the School QBE funding formula for all students in the school system (\$147 million).
3. Reduction in funds for the Babies Can't Wait Program (\$1.2 million).
4. Provider rates that were promised to be increased last legislative session were cancelled.

5. Cuts of over \$6 million in state funds were made to programs that were used for services and training across the state.

Of course this is not everything that happened during the legislative session but I wanted to give you a VERY brief overview and help you see our “opportunities for improvement” in the State of Georgia for our families! I’ve also included Unlock the Waiting Lists recap for the legislative session below. We need continue our advocacy efforts on home and community based waivers. The waiting lists are at an all time high of 7,000! This is unacceptable!

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A few weeks ago I wrote to you about Cherokee County wanting to cut the funding for paraprofessionals working with children with disabilities. Due to the grassroots advocacy efforts lead by Stephanie Meredith (parent), they are making progress. Cherokee County has responded to families concerns and stated that IEP's would not be changed and that federal stimulus funds would be used to preserve the positions of some paraprofessionals. This is excellent news. Once again, it shows the power of advocating for change and educating others for the need for services. See below details.

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Great news- Variety of Georgia is having a "Give a Bike" Fundraiser for children with disabilities at Chili's Restaurants throughout metro Atlanta (excluding airport locations and Discover Mills) to be held on 5/14/09, 6/9/09 and 7/14/09. Below is the press release that was issued out regarding this wonderful fundraising opportunity to raise money to help families receive bikes for their children.

We were very blessed to be one of those families last year to receive a bike from Variety of Georgia. Note: Jacob and Jared are the ones pictured on the Chili's flyer. Please support this wonderful organization and eat at Chili's and help raise money for bikes. I will have the Chili's flyer and press release posted on my website very soon.

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Organizing for America is embarking on a multiple-stop tour of Georgia to re-engage with grassroot volunteers, gain community feedback and continue the discussion about how best to provide advocacy for the success of President Barack Obama's legislative agenda to reform Health Care, Energy and Education in America. See below information on times/dates for scheduled events across GA. We need to continue to educate those that don't understand the needs of the disability community. See below on how you can get involved.

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Office of Developmental Disabilities announced that they are having another new DD Waivers seminar on May 19, 2009 in Morrow, GA. See below for more details. I will also have the full announcement posted on my website under “Events” very soon. This is **YOUR** opportunity to express your concerns and suggestions regarding the implementation of these new waivers (since 11/1/08). I know there continues to be families that have had a loss of services and providers. Only through continuing to educate the Office of DD on the families concerns, are we going to make a change in these waivers. The time is now to voice your suggestions. A new Dept. of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities is forming now!

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Below is a link from video on CNN regarding a writing program (TV Teacher) that has helped many children with disabilities (including my son). Please take a look at this video. Originally, CNN was going to air it the first of the month in honor of Autism Awareness but have not done so. They are waiting to see how many hits they get. Please take time to look at the video.

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Below is also a letter to the editor of the Augusta Chronicle regarding the upside of children with Down syndrome. Thought you might enjoy. (Thanks Nilda for forwarding).

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In addition, Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is having a workshop on "A How to Guide to Social Inclusion: An Asset Based Community Development". More information below.

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Education is definitely the key to success in helping others understand our precious children and the services they need to be successful in life! We have a long way to go but we must continue to advocate in order to influence change in society. Hope you find this information inspiring, helpful and motivating to help you to get involved for change!

Have a great weekend.

***"UNITED – WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"***

Sincerely,

***Heidi***

**(Proud Mother to Jacob - 9 yrs old with Down syndrome and Jared - 7 yrs old)**

***"Help the Children Now, So They Can Help Themselves Later!"***

[www.heidijmoore.com](http://www.heidijmoore.com)

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### **Unlock the Waiting List Capitol Recap**

I want to thank everyone that responded to our plea for help in the last few months. Over 4,000 emails went into our State legislators, asking them to continue funding supports for people with disabilities. All of our state Representatives and Senators heard from us in one way or another. And I believe that you did make a difference in preventing cuts from going deeper. However, it was not a good year.

### **The BAD or NEUTRAL NEWS in the FY2010 budget:**

There were no disability services funded for people with physical or developmental disabilities on the community waiting list. Provider rate increases promised during last session were cancelled. And there were over \$6 million of cuts proposed for state funds used for contracts, services and training across the state. We also saw over \$2 million for 135 Developmental Disability slots that were restored to our system in the Governor's budget proposal - these are not new services, just moneys that would have been taken back as people passed away from current waiver slots. These dollars have been used in the past to prevent institutionalization of people who are in deep crisis.

### **The GOOD NEWS in the FY2010 budget:**

Because of the Federal agreement to implement the Money Follows the Person grant, \$3.5 million were funded for 150 Developmental Disability waiver slots and 100 Independent Care Waiver slots so that people with physical and developmental disabilities could transition into community supports living from nursing home and institutional care. However these are dollars only available to those currently receiving services, just in the wrong place.

### **WE SHARED OUR PAIN**

However, while the Federal stimulus funds prevented the FY2010 budget from being worse, there were over \$2.5 billion in cuts that ended with deep cuts to important programs across state agencies. Many programs were cut this year. But we know that the economy made it a very difficult year, the FY10 budget is a clear step backwards in reducing Georgia's waiting lists for people with disabilities. By this time next year, our disability waiting lists of close to 7,000 Georgians will grow by more than a thousand over the next twelve months.

### **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE THIS YEAR FROM THE PAST?**

In the past, our success has been directly tied to our state leadership understanding that our need is real. That is the amazing job you have done and continue to do to advocate for those you care for. However, over the past 5 years, our state legislators have enjoyed surplus money that comes from a strong and robust Georgia economy. In FY2004, Georgia grew by 1.6% and in the FY05 budget funded only 30 MRWP slots with \$300,000 state funds. The waiting list was over 4,000 at that time! However, from FY2005 to FY2008, Georgia's economy grew an average of 6.9%, and during that time we saw the General Assembly fund over 4,425 MRWP and 373 ICWP NEW slots as well as a 4.5% rate increase for DD providers. In contrast, this latest year, Georgia's revenue to date has decreased by 8% in FY09. Without finding other revenue solutions, the General Assembly funded only the number of services they had to while making cuts to over \$6 million in services, contracts and training programs.

### **LESSONS LEARNED: MOVING FORWARD**

Our recent history suggests that progress in unlocking Georgia's waiting lists is tied to additional revenue from a strong economy. If revenue continues to be reduced during these hard times, Georgia will find it more difficult to protect disability supports against further drastic cuts without looking at revenue solutions.

Your involvement will remain vital over the next few months to prevent further cuts. Stay tuned...

Dave Blanchard  
Unlock the Waiting Lists Campaign

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**Cherokee County School System Update- Advocacy in Action!:**

First, I want to thank you all for making your voices heard about the issues that matter to you regarding the recent Cherokee budget proposal. As parents and members of the community, it is vital that our elected representatives understand our priorities so that they can reflect those same priorities in their policies.

I was glad to see that the district responded to our concerns by sending home a letter to parents, assuring them that IEP's would not be changed and that federal stimulus funds would be used to preserve the positions of some paraprofessionals. The Cherokee school district has provided excellent services in the past, and we are grateful to hear that the district plans to continue.

While I genuinely appreciate this recognition of our priorities, some of the details remain unclear, so it is still important for us to remain active in communicating with our elected leaders and to show our commitment and unity. A few of us are planning on speaking along with GAE President Jeff Hubbard tomorrow night at the school board meeting, and it would convey a more unified message if we appeared together even if you have no desire to speak.

If you are interested in attending, the meeting will be held in the Historic Canton High School (at 120 Academy Street in historic downtown Canton) at 7:00. It will be a busy night, so you might have to wait outside until some of those receiving recognitions that night are dismissed. For more information about the meeting, see:

<http://portal.cherokee.k12.ga.us/board/meetings/042309/default.aspx>

Best Regards, Stephanie Meredith [stephaniem@canisterco.com](mailto:stephaniem@canisterco.com);

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**Variety of Georgia “Give a Bike” fundraiser for children with disabilities at Chili’s restaurants in the metro Atlanta area – Press Release:**

**For more information:**  
Kristin Cowart, KC Public Relations  
404.233.3993 / [kcowart@kcpr.net](mailto:kcowart@kcpr.net)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TAKE A BITE AND “GIVE A BIKE” – VARIETY OF GEORGIA AND CHILI’S®  
PARTNER TO PEPPER IN SOME HOPE AND PAY IT FORWARD**

*Lend a helping hand and enjoy a mouthwatering meal to make mobility manageable for youth*

**ATLANTA, GA (April 20, 2009)** – This summer, Chili’s® is partnering with Variety of Georgia in its “Give a Bike” fundraising efforts. “Give a Bike” Fundraiser Days at Chili’s® are an extension of Variety of Georgia’s Mobility for Kids Program. Launched in May of 2006, Mobility for Kids is an evolving program that aims to ensure that all of Georgia’s children with mobility challenges receive the bikes, lifts, wheelchairs, walkers and prosthetic limbs they need.

To date, Variety of Georgia has presented nine deserving children and families with specially outfitted bikes and mobility devices. In Atlanta, Chili’s® is helping to further the cause. With each Variety of Georgia “Give a Bike” flyer presented at participating Chili’s® restaurants on specially designated days, Chili’s® will donate 10% of that customer’s sales to Variety of Georgia.

**Experience “Give a Bike” Fundraiser Days every second Tuesday of the month through July at participating locations. Come enjoy food, philanthropy and fun at all metro Atlanta Chili’s® restaurants, excluding airport and Discover Mills locations, on May 12, June 9 and July 14 – and pepper in some hope this summer with Variety of Georgia’s “Give a Bike” Fundraiser Days.**

**About Variety of Georgia**

Established in Atlanta in 1939 as the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of Variety Clubs International, known as “The World’s Greatest Children’s Charity”, **Variety of Georgia has donated over \$1 million dollars** to enhance the lives of children in need who may be challenged by physical and/or mental disabilities, poverty, abuse or neglect. Following the tradition of the founders of the first Tent (chapter) in Pittsburgh back in 1927, 80% of the current members of Tent 21 (21<sup>st</sup> chapter to be formed) as it is known, are from the Motion Picture Industry, though membership is open to all who care about children and meeting their needs.

The vernacular of the circus is employed in the Variety structure with the clubs often called “Tents” and the members “Barkers” since the first fundraising affair in Pittsburgh used the circus motif and was held under a “Big Top” tent with a sawdust floor. Since those humble beginnings, Variety Clubs International has grown to 52 chapters in 14 countries worldwide with over 15,000 members – raising over \$1 billion for special needs children.

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If you have any questions about these events, please contact Mike Simonds from Variety of Georgia at 678.994.4210 or [mike@varietyofgeorgia.org](mailto:mike@varietyofgeorgia.org).

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**Organizing for America- Town Hall Meetings**

Organizing for America is embarking on a multiple-stop tour of Georgia to re-engage with grassroots volunteers, gain community feedback and continue the discussion about how best to provide advocacy for

the success of President Barack Obama's legislative agenda to reform Health Care, Energy and Education in America.

If you can't attend a Town Hall, please fill out this survey,  
<http://my.barackobama.com/page/s/Itsurvey>

WHAT: Listening Tour Town Halls  
WHEN: April 23-May 16  
WHERE: <http://ga.barackobama.com/ListeningTourGA>

Your ideas will be used to write a Georgia-specific plan for Organizing for America in 2009 and beyond. These meetings are not just for folks who were involved in the Obama campaign.

I look forward to seeing you,

Lee Goodall  
Georgia State Director  
Organizing for America6BA96

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### **MHDDAD – Georgia's new DD Waivers Seminar- May 19, 2009:**

The Division of MHDDAD Office of Developmental Disabilities will host an Evening Family Forum in Metro Atlanta for Waiver Participants, Representatives, Families, and Support Networks

Georgia's 'New' DD Waivers:  
"NOW" and "COMP"

**When: Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 6:00 - 8:30pm**

**Where: Clayton State University- Downs Center for Continuing Ed. (Room: CE 101)  
5900 North Lee Street Morrow, GA 30260**

For driving directions, please visit: <http://conted.clayton.edu/directions.html> or go to page 3 of this announcement for more detailed directions.

### **AGENDA**

The Family Forum will provide an overview of the two new federal Medicaid waivers and plans for implementing the changes in 2009:

- **NOW: New Options Waiver** for persons who live with family members or in their own home, and
- **COMP: Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program** for persons who need a full range of out-of-home services or intensive, in-home services who do not otherwise qualify for the NOW program

This seminar is the second in a series of events designed to educate participants, families, and representatives about the “new” waivers which are designed to offer persons more control over how their service dollars are spent. The session will include overviews of both waivers and specific roles and responsibilities for participants, representatives, families, and support networks.

Refreshments will be available for session attendees.

**If accommodation is needed (interpreter, etc), please send your request promptly via email to [RegistrationMHDDAD@dhr.state.ga.us](mailto:RegistrationMHDDAD@dhr.state.ga.us) or call Mat Winer at 404-463-0796.**

**Please Register by May 12, 2009!!**

**Option 1: Please register on the web** at <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/training/dhr>

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CNN Video on Autism and use of TV Teacher:

<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/living/2009/04/22/nr.phillips.tv.teacher.cnn>

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**Augusta Chronicle letter to the Editor- Upside of Down syndrome:**

*Down syndrome children are treasures*

*John Capes/ Letter to the Editor*

*Tuesday, March 31, 2009*

*A few days ago the world celebrated World Down Syndrome Day. I did not know it existed until it was brought to my attention by the young mother of a Down syndrome child born last year.*

*I had never personally known a person with a DS child and felt uncomfortable around DS children, but last year I had the great opportunity to meet a baby boy born with DS. I was not sure how I would react, but that child, 6 months old, glowed with pure love and all that is good in this world! I fell in love with him the minute I held him, and he gave me the biggest smile I have seen, He is the purest love and joy I have ever experienced, including the birth of my own children*

*I will never look again at a Down syndrome child without knowing that God placed an angel on earth for all to see. I urge you to seek out and work with these children of God; they are truly special people! With great gifts, I assure you, you will be a better person for doing so. I know I am*

*John Capes  
Martinez*

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## **A How to Guide to Social Inclusion: An Asset Based Community Development Workshop:**

The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is pleased to announce that Mike Green and Bruce Anderson, internationally renowned speakers and authors on the issue of social inclusion will deliver a workshop in Atlanta on June 2-3 at the Trinity United Methodist Church 265 Washington Street SW Atlanta, GA

Space is limited. For more information and to register:

<http://web.me.com/gcdd/GCDD/Home.html>

### **SPEAKERS**

Mike has worked for over twenty years as a community organizer and trainer in Canada and the US. He has experience developing neighborhood resident organizations, faith based organizations, and community partnerships to address social and economic issues. Today much of Mike's work is about using Asset Based Community Development to address the question of building more inclusive communities.

Mike's inclusion work has a focus on two related questions: organizing local residents in everyday life for inclusion of more isolated people; and helping service provider agencies get organized to support these local citizen groups in their work for community inclusion. Bruce Anderson is a partner in Community Activators, working to implement innovative community development and social service practices across the United States. The organization provides help by supporting local groups in organizing and implementing community strengthening ideas.

Bruce has a particular interest in encouraging communities and human service organizations to imagine how old cultural ideas and stories might be helpful to us as we continue forward with our efforts to strengthen the people and communities we serve.