



Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Bulletin

“Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups, and organizations!”

Empowerment! Opportunity! Justice!

May – June, 2008

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Please let us know!

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<i>In This Issue</i>	<i>Page</i>
May is Mental Health Month & State Legislative Outcomes	2
Armand LeGault fighting the good fight	5
September 27 Convention and Expo	6
Help Me Grow breakfast, HOPE Center workshops for families & NEAT events	7
Mental Health and Aging, DD Council workshops, & two Public Hearings (SILC and BESB)	8
CT AARP Forum on Health Care & CPAC workshop	9
PATH event, Eye Openers, & summit on parents with cognitive disabilities	10
BESB awards & job openings	11
DAC regional contacts & Americorps	12
National news: College students share strategies, 2008 stimulus package, the ADA Restoration Act, parents of children with visual disabilities	13

May is Mental Health Month!

For over 50 years, our country has celebrated "*May is Mental Health Month*" to raise awareness about mental illness and the importance of mental wellness for all. In observance of May as Mental Health Month, the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB) has worked with community providers to develop a calendar of events.

During May, seventeen mental health organizations in lower Fairfield County will be offering over 20 special events and programs aimed at educating and informing the general public about these often misunderstood illnesses. The calendar and resource information can be downloaded from the SWRMHB website at www.swrmhb.org.

State Legislative Update

Not much good news from the State Capitol this spring. More bills affecting children and adults with disabilities died or were not acted on than were passed. But there is some good news.

Much of what follows is taken from reports prepared by Beth Leslie, Legislative Liaison for the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, who does an amazing job putting together weekly Bill Tracking Reports. Her final report is available on-line at www.ct.gov/opapd. Beth's e-mail address is beth.leslie@po.state.ct.us and her phone number is 860-297-4369.

BUDGET:

HB 5666 AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF THE PILOT PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS. This bill expands the geographic area covered and the capacity of the pilot program from 50 to 75 individuals. The total FY 09 funding is therefore \$1.5 million. Currently, there are 29 individuals enrolled in the pilot program, which has a total FY 08 appropriation of \$1 million. Given the average annual cost of the current enrollees and other program costs, it is anticipated that an additional 18 - 20 individuals can be served in the pilot program in FY 09 (for a total of 47 - 49 participants). It does not appear that the \$1.5 million budget will allow the program to go beyond 49 participants.

SB 561 AN ACT CONCERNING THE MONEY FOLLOWS THE PERSON PROJECT.

This bill increases, from 700 to 5,000, the number of individuals who can be served under the Money Follows the Person (MFP) Demonstration program. MFP is a five-year program that permits states to move individuals out of nursing homes or other institutional settings and into less-restrictive, community-based settings. DSS has developed a protocol for the demonstration, which needs federal approval before it can be implemented. The bill also requires the DSS commissioner to develop a plan to establish and administer a similar home- and community-based services (HCBS) project for adults who may not meet the MFP institutionalization requirement. Finally, the bill establishes a separate, non-lapsing General Fund account to hold the enhanced federal matching funds the state receives for MFP. It specifies the uses of funds in the account and requires a report on expenditures from it.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2008

EDUCATION:

SB 418 AN ACT CONCERNING THE HIRING OF SUPPORT STAFF FOR TEACHERS OF THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED. This bill authorizes up to 5% of the Board of Education and Services to the Blind's (BESB) Educational Aid account appropriation to be used to employ "special assistants to the blind" and other support staff needed to ensure services are delivered efficiently. By law, BESB must generally provide teachers of the visually impaired, when school districts request them, as well as other resources. It can already use funds from this account to employ these teachers, as well as rehabilitation teachers and technologists and orientation and mobility teachers.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2008

HB 5590 AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS CONCERNING AUTISM AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

The bill requires the Commissioners of Education and Developmental Services, and the Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) to define autism and developmental disabilities, and to define a state-wide plan to incorporate methods of teaching children with autism and developmental disabilities into programs, requirements, and training. The bill also requires that while developing recommendations related to programs, requirements, and training, the responsible parties must take into consideration a set of issues (defined by the bill) related to children with autism and developmental disabilities.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE (FMLA):

SB 65 AN ACT ALLOWING BLIND OR PHYSICALLY DISABLED STATE OR QUASI-PUBLIC EMPLOYEES TO USE ACCUMULATED SICK LEAVE FOR GUIDE DOG TRAINING. This bill gives permanent full-time state employees and full-time quasi-public agency employees who are blind or physically disabled the option of using accumulated paid sick leave, not to exceed 15 days per year, to take guide dog or assistance dog training.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2008

HB 5696 AN ACT REQUIRING INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER THERAPIES. This bill requires health insurance policies delivered, issued, renewed, amended, or continued in Connecticut on or after January 1, 2009 to cover physical, speech, and occupational therapy services provided to treat autism spectrum disorders if the policies cover these services for other diseases and conditions. It defines "autism spectrum disorder" as the American Psychiatric Association's most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders uses the phrase.

It applies this requirement to group and individual (1) health insurance policies that cover basic hospital, medical-surgical, or major medical expenses; (2) HMO contracts covering hospital and medical expenses; and (3) hospital or medical service contracts. Due to federal law, this requirement does not apply to self-insured plans.

HOUSING:

SB 2 AN ACT CONCERNING AN EMERGENCY RELIEF PLAN FOR CONNECTICUT FAMILIES FOR HOUSING COSTS AND ENHANCEMENTS TO SUPPORTIVE HOUSING. This bill authorizes the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to provide an additional 500 "Next Steps" supportive housing units for people with mental illness. EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

LONG TERM CARE:

SB 414 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE-FUNDED HOME CARE PROGRAM FOR THE DISABLED. This bill increases the asset limits in the state-funded, pilot home and community-based services program for adults under age 65. Currently, assets are limited to 100% and 150% of the minimum community spouse protected amount (CSPA) (spousal asset protection in Medicaid long-term care law) for single and married applicants, respectively. The bill increases the limits to 150% and 200% of the minimum CSPA, respectively, by tying the limits to those in the state-funded Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders (CHCPE). Thus, under the bill, the increases for 2008 are: (1) \$20,888 to \$31,320 for a single person and (2) \$31,320 to \$ 41,760 for a married couple.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2008

Charter Oak

Attorney Sheldon Taubman from New Haven Legal Assistance reports that HB 5617, the watered down Charter Oak improvement bill which was JF'd by the Human Services Committee, was gutted further in the House to remove everything but the requirement of mental health parity. The bill was passed on a party line vote by the House, but did not come up for a vote by the Senate where it died.

Sheldon also reports that HB 5618, which would have required a delay of one year in the return of HMOs to running the HUSKY program, a separation of HMO contracting under it from contracting under the Governor's Charter Oak Health Insurance Plan, and a study of the various ways of delivering health care under HUSKY during the one-year moratorium, died on the House calendar at the end of the legislative session. This was despite a valiant effort by dozens of HUSKY parents who, as members of the activist group CT Parent Power, went up to the Capitol the night before to demand action on the bill.

BESB Legislation

Brian Sigman, BESB Executive Director, reports that Senate Bills 418 and 298 both passed the Senate and the House of Representatives and were forwarded to the Governor for her signature. Senate Bill 418 – as reported above - expands the authority of the agency to use the Children's Services funds to hire Special Assistants to the Blind and support staff. Senate Bill 298 is a broad scope bill that included provisions to raise the penalty for failure to yield to a pedestrian who is blind, and elevates the violation to an infraction, with all of the associated court fees.

Armand Legault: Fighting the Good Fight! Won't You Join Him?

Excerpts from Mark Johnson's list serv mailing about the battle Newington's Armand LeGault is waging about Medicare funding of complex power wheelchairs:

"The 58-year-old Connecticut resident is knowledgeable, articulate and good-natured. But when it comes to his efforts to convince Congress to protect patients' access to complex power wheelchairs, Legault's best asset might be his physical presence.

Legault is paralyzed because of muscular dystrophy and is only able to move around – and get to Capitol Hill – because of his wheelchair, a custom-fitted, high-tech contraption with gears and levers that allow him to position and reposition his body.

In an ordinary electric wheelchair, Legault would be vulnerable to circulation problems and painful pressure sores. 'You can't just get fitted for a wheelchair like this off the street,' Legault said. It can take 10 visits to a vendor to fit the chair properly. Now Legault is worried that changes to a Medicare program designed to cut costs could affect the quality of service associated with these high-end wheelchairs.

An army of professional lobbyists is working toward the same goal as Legault, a retired state tax auditor and patient advocate, but their mutual success is far from assured. In a series of lobbying meetings in April, organized by Quinn Gillespie & Associates and the National Coalition for Assistive and Rehab Technology (NCART), Legault and the lobbyists have sought to convince lawmakers to exempt complex wheelchairs from a new competitive bidding program for Medicare.

Perhaps foremost among the difficulties will be making lawmakers understand the difference between these Stephen Hawking-style wheelchairs and standard electric wheelchairs and scooters, which are costing Medicare hundreds of millions of dollars a year in spending. Those costs have raised eyebrows on Capitol Hill.

Under Medicare's new program, durable medical equipment (DME) suppliers have to bid to be allowed to sell their products to Medicare beneficiaries. It is a business worth billions of dollars: the program covers items ranging from diabetes test strips and walkers to oxygen tanks and power wheelchairs, both simple and complex. In all cases, suppliers will get paid less than they are now.

The challenge faced by Legault and NCART lies in trying to convince Congress that they are not just one more special interest complaining about Medicare payments – a popular sport in Washington.

In the coming days, CMS will announce the winners of the first round of bids. The program takes effect on July 1 in 10 metropolitan areas. Also in July, CMS will begin accepting bids for 70 more metro areas as part of a multi-year, nationwide phase-in.

Congress instructed CMS to design and implement the competitive bidding program in a 2003 statute. Lawmakers saw evidence mounting that Medicare spending on durable medical equipment was growing at an alarming rate. Medicare spending on power wheelchairs spiked 450 percent between 1999 and 2003, when it topped \$1 billion, according to the Government Accountability Office.

‘When they hear ‘power wheelchair,’ they think of overutilization and fraud and abuse,’ said Paul Bergantino, the president of ATG Rehab, a Connecticut-based vendor of power wheelchairs, scooters and other equipment. ‘We got caught in the crossfire,’ said Bergantino, whose firm supplies and services Legault’s wheelchairs.

Legault is worried about what all of this will mean to him and his health. A vendor that does not specialize in complex wheelchairs cannot provide the service he needs, he said. ‘They’re going to deal with me? ... They’re going to laugh and walk away. ... They have no idea what is entailed, so I’m going to get a bad product.’ ”

Save the Date!

The Disability Advocacy Collaborative presents the

2nd Disability Convention and Expo

Saturday September 27, 2008

At the Connecticut Expo Center
265 Reverend Moody Overpass, Hartford (off I-91 Exit 33)

10 am – 4 pm

- Meet with elected officials and candidates for Office
- Visit vendors carrying the latest in adaptive equipment and technology
- Attend presentations on topics vital to the disability community, such as employment and transportation
- Get information on the many services available for children and adults with disabilities
- Bring the kids, participate in fun activities for the whole family
- GET READY TO VOTE ON NOVEMBER 4

Waterbury Help Me Grow Networking Breakfast

The next Waterbury Help Me Grow networking breakfast will be held on Wednesday, May 28, from 9:00 – 10:30 am. The location is at Family Services of Greater Waterbury, 34 Murray Street in Waterbury. Nieka Thompson, Attorney-At-Law from Connecticut Legal Services in Waterbury, will be the guest speaker. She will explain the special education laws and how to navigate the system, and will also share information about Connecticut Legal Services, a nonprofit corporation.

Contact person for the event is Laura Baird, Primary Prevention Services Coordinator for the Children's Trust Fund. She can be reached by phone at (203) 207-5280 and by e-mail at laura.baird@ct.gov.

Hope Center Offers Workshops for Parents

The Hope Center for Autism and Related Disorders has announced a workshop series for parents of young children. Practical strategies will be offered along with multiple examples and time for questions. Sessions will be held at The Hope Center (19 Ludlow Road, Suite 202, Westport, CT 06880) from 9:15 to 11:45 am with coffee and ...

Dates and Topics:

May 28 - Building Social Skills through Structured Play Dates

June 11 - Addressing Your Child's Sensory Needs

June 18 - Beyond the "Bed-time Story": Components of Effective Sleep Programs

June 25 - Designing Individualized Education Programs

Advance registration fee for an individual session is \$65. In an effort to facilitate discussions and address questions, enrollment will be very limited. To register or for more information, call the Hope Center at 203-227-3383. On-site babysitting may be arranged in advance for an additional fee.

NEAT Offerings

The NEAT Center in Hartford will present a "Vision Open House" on Thursday, May 29, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Center, 120 Holcomb Street in Hartford. Learn about the latest equipment and services currently available for people who are blind or visually impaired. Representatives from several leading manufacturers and service providers will be available to provide hands-on product overview and to answer questions.

For more information call 860-243-2869 or 860-286-3113 (TTY), or e-mail info@neatmarketplace.org. You can also get information about the event at www.neatmarketplace.org. The web site includes a wide range of workshops that NEAT will be offering over the next six months.

News from the Connecticut Coalition on Mental Health and Aging

A new coalition has been formed in Connecticut—the Connecticut Coalition on Mental Health and Aging, chaired by Dominique "Dee" Thornton, J.D., from the Mental Health Association of Connecticut. The next Coalition meeting will be on Thursday, May 29, 2008 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Mental Health Association offices, 20-30 Beaver Road, Wethersfield. Those planning to attend, or who cannot attend but have an issue or concern they would like addressed, are asked to contact Meghan Maxwell at 800-842-1501 or 860-529-1970, extension 10, or email mmaxwell@mhact.org .

Next in the Series of DD Council Events

The next event in the Council on Developmental Disabilities' series on Life Threatening Public Policy will be held on May 30 from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm and the topic is “Quality Of Life and Medical Deathmaking”. The workshop will be held at the Institute of Technology and Business Development, Central Connecticut State University in New Britain.

The June workshops in the series, which also run from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm, include:

June 13 - “Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide”

June 27 - “Constructive Responses to Life Threatening Public Policy”

To register for any event, call 418-6157, or toll free 1-800-653-1134, or e-mail ed.preneta@ct.gov. There is no cost to attend.

Notice of Two Public Hearings

A public hearing to gather input on proposed revisions to the 2008-2010 *Connecticut State Plan of Independent Living* will be held on Monday, June 2, from 1:00 – 3:00 pm at the New Park Office and Conference Center, 151 New Park Avenue (The Hartford Room) in Hartford. People with disabilities, service providers and the general public are invited to participate. Interpreter services will be provided.

For more information, including summary of proposed revisions to the plan, contact the SILC office at (860) 523-0126 in Hartford or email Debbie Melaragno at deb.ctsilc@gmail.com.

The *Board of Education and Services for the Blind* will be conducting public hearings on Wednesday, June 11, 2008 from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for the purpose of updating the State Plan that governs the administration of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. A draft policy revision concerning the provision of books and supplies to consumers served within the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program will also be a subject of this public hearing. The public hearings will be conducted concurrently at the following locations:

1. Board of Education and Services for the Blind - 184 Windsor Avenue, Executive Conference Room - Windsor

2. Silas Bronson Library - 267 Grand Street, Mezzanine Room - Waterbury
3. South East Connecticut Community Center of the Blind - 120 Broad Street - New London
4. Norwalk Community College - 188 Richards Avenue, Founder's Room, East 212 - Norwalk
5. CT Works One Stop - 560 Ella Grasso Boulevard - New Haven

The purpose of the hearings is to offer the public, consumers, advocates, agencies and organizations an opportunity to review and provide comments pertaining to the proposed State Plan annual updates. The State Plan annual updates are available for review at the agency web site (www.ct.gov/besb) under the Vocational Rehabilitation Section. Print, Braille, and diskette copies of the State Plan annual updates will be available at the public hearings, or may be requested in advance of the hearings by contacting the agency at (860) 602-4010. Comments may be submitted at any of the public hearings, or may be submitted via email to: besb@ct.gov; mailed to Brian Sigman, Executive Director, BESB, 184 Windsor Avenue, Windsor, CT, 06095, or recorded onto voice mail at (860) 602-4100. All comments received prior to the close of business on Friday, June 13, 2008 will be fully considered in the final version of the State Plan annual updates.

AARP Presents: Opinion Leader Forum on Health Care

Connecticut AARP is holding an Opinion Leader Forum on Health Care the morning of June 5 at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. Registration begins at 9 a.m. The program is from 10:15 a.m. until Noon.

Joining AARP, as members of the Opinion Leader Panel, will be: Brian Burnell, Chief Political Reporter, New England Cable News, Moderator; David W. Benfer, CEO of St. Raphael Healthcare System in New Haven; Angelo S. Carrabba, MD, President of the CT State Medical Society; Juan A. Figueroa; President of Universal Health Care Foundation of CT; Andrew Markowski, State Director of the National Federation of Independent Business; and John Olsen, President, CT AFL-CIO.

The Connecticut forum is one of hundreds that AARP is sponsoring across the country with experts and leaders from across the political spectrum. They want to jumpstart a national conversation to get past the partisan gridlock in Washington and start delivering answers to our nation's most pressing domestic challenges.

CPAC to offer IEP Workshop

The Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center will be offering a workshop titled IEP Goals 101, on Thursday, June 5th, from 7:00 pm until 8:30 pm. This event will take place at the New Britain Library Community Room. This training will teach participants how to identify key information

to incorporate into the present level of academic and functional performance and how to use present levels of academic and functional performance to create measurable goals and objectives.

This workshop is free for parents. CPAC encourages parents to bring a copy of your child's IEP to the workshop; this is not required, but may be very helpful.

To register please call CPAC at 860-739-3089 or 800-445-2722 or write to cpac@cpacinc.org .

Parents Available to Help (PATH)

Parents Available to Help (PATH) has organized day of food and fun with plenty to do for everyone, both those with and those without disabilities. The event will be held on Saturday, June 7 at the East Haven Town Green from 11:00 am – 4:00 pm. The rain date is June 14.

Activities planned include: *Carnival games *Obstacle Courses *Bounce Houses *Stuff-a-Bear *Hair Braiding *Face Painting *Touch-a-Truck *Meet B.B., the Bluefish mascot *Peabody Museum's "hands on" Table *Enjoy the food ...and so much more to see and do!

For more information, please contact Chris Sloss @ 203-882-1068 or cmsloss@optonline.net.

Eye Openers: Helping Older Adults with Severe Vision Loss

The Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) and the North Central Area Agency on Aging will offer a workshop for staff and volunteers in the Greater Hartford area who provide services to people who are elderly. The event will be held on Friday, June 13 at the Marriott Hotel, 15 Farm Springs Road in Farmington.

For more information contact Maureen McIntyre at Maureen.mcintyre@ncaaact.org, 860-602-4030 or Marsha Brown, 860-602-4046.

Parents with Cognitive Limitations: A Summit for the Future

Come hear what's working on a national level to support parents with cognitive disabilities, and help create Connecticut's plan to address the service needs of these families. The event will be held on Tuesday, June 24, 2008 from 8:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. at Amarante's Sea Cliff in New Haven.

The intended audience for the conference is Bureau Chiefs, Area Directors, Program Directors, Program Supervisors and Supervisors in State departments, and Executive Staff in other agencies. Guests will include the Thortons, a family previously interviewed on 60 Minutes. Topics will include the challenges of screening and identifying families and effective strategies for working with them. To date over 600 people throughout the state have been trained on

identifying and working with these families. The next step requires changes that can only come about through the leadership of decision-makers.

For more information contact wendy.kwalwasser@ct.gov.

BESB Awards of Excellence

The Board of Education and Services for the Blind has announced that the agency is now accepting nominations for the 2008 Awards of Excellence. There are six nomination categories including awards for students, small and large businesses, entrepreneurs who are blind, consumers, teachers, and community boards and foundations. The nomination submission deadline is June 27, 2008. An awards ceremony will be held in October in conjunction with White Cane Safety Day in Connecticut. Specific information about the nomination process will be available on the agency website (www.ct.gov/besb) in the near future.

Job Openings

Walgreens will soon be opening a large distribution center in Windsor, eventually employing up to 600-800 workers. The company has a goal that one-third of its workforce will be persons with disabilities. Currently, Walgreens is hiring supervisory, management and human resources personnel. To complete an online application, go to www.walgreens.jobs. Click on "Distribution Centers." If you are applying for a management or human resources job, click that link. Choose the area where you will work – Windsor, Connecticut. Fill out the online application.

FYI, the Walgreens chief recruiter is Kathleen Cawley (kathleen.cawley@walgreens.com).

The Kennedy Center in Trumbull has two positions available in the field of disability. They are currently seeking a Manager for their Autism Project. The position responsibilities include: "program and service development, grant writing, service coordination and community networking. Clinical knowledge and experience in the field of autism and in working with children and families in urban and suburban environments. Masters Degree preferred."

The Kennedy Center is also seeking a Special Educator and/or an Early Childhood professional for their Birth to Three program. The position provides "an exciting opportunity to work within a dynamic team providing individualized services for infant and toddlers with special needs and their families. Conduct evaluations and assessments, develop and implement special education services as part of trans-disciplinary team. Must have B.S. in Special Education, Early Childhood Education or related field."

Interested persons should contact the Recruitment Manager at the Kennedy Center - 2440 Reservoir Avenue - Trumbull, CT 06611 - Fax: 203-371-1479 - Email: hr@kennedyctr.org.

Child FIRST, a program within the Department of Pediatrics at Bridgeport Hospital has a full-time job opening for a Mental Health Consultant/Child Development Specialist. The duties of this position include: "provides comprehensive child and family assessments and consultation within the home and early child care settings, and partners with the family in the development of an integrated family plan of supports and services in order to prevent or remediate emotional and

behavioral disorders”. Requirements: “Licensed clinician with doctoral or masters degree in psychology, social work or related field”.

For additional information, please contact: Rosemarie Coratola - Program Director, Child FIRST - Department of Pediatrics - Bridgeport Hospital - 267 Grant Street - P.O. Box 5000 - Bridgeport, CT 06610-0120 – office phone:(203) 384-4704 – cell phone: (203) 605-6243 - Email: vrhora@bpthosp.org.

Disability Advocacy Collaborative Regional Contacts

To get involved with one of the Collaborative’s Regional Advocacy Networks, contact the following:

Northwest -- contact: Bill Knight (lackerman01@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Litchfield Arc

Southwest –contact: Carol Kana (pkana@snet.net) – meetings are held at the Norwalk Police Department

Danbury Area – contact Dale Brown (dbrown@wecahr.org) – meetings are held at Ability Beyond Disability in Bethel

North Central — contact: Candace Low (clow@independenceunlimited.org) – meetings are held at 151 New Park Avenue in Hartford – next meeting June 30 at 10 am

Waterbury Area –contact: Mike Valuckas (mike.valuckas@independencenorthwest.org) – contact Mike for information about next meeting

Northeast Area – contact: Carolyn Newcombe (cnewcombe@charter.net) – meetings are held at the Mansfield Senior Center – next meeting June 10 at 6 pm

Bridgeport Area – contact: Tony LaCava (tlacava@drcfc.org) – meetings are on the third Thursday of the month at various sites

News from Americorps

Help AmeriCorps get things done! AmeriCorps programs across Connecticut are currently accepting applications for the summer of 2008 and the 2008-2009 program years. AmeriCorps programs improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. They address needs in the areas of education, public safety, poverty, environmental conservation, and disaster relief among others. Full-time (1700 hours), part-time (300-900 hours), and summer positions (300 hours) are available. During their term of service, members receive a modest living allowance and, upon completion of their term, an Education Award, which can be used towards school or college loans.

To serve in AmeriCorps, members must be at least 17 years of age and be a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident alien of the U.S. Most programs require a high school diploma or a GED. Qualified individuals with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply and reasonable accommodations are provided. Prospective applicants should visit www.ctdhe.org/cccs or www.americorps.gov and contact the program(s) of their

choice for more information. Organizations interested in learning more can contact Zohra Ayub at 860-947-1826 for more information.

College Students with Disabilities Share Strategies

The New England ADA Technical Assistance Center in Boston and No Limits Media have released four fresh and informative videos of college students with disabilities sharing strategies they use to succeed in staying in school, graduate and land jobs. Students discuss the issues of self-reporting and negotiating accommodations in school and at work. The videos can be used as part of trainings (each video is 7-9 minutes) and can be shared with other students and professionals. Visit www.NewEnglandADA.org to view videos. DVDs are available upon request.

It's not too Late to File for Your 2008 Stimulus Payment

Even though the April 15 tax deadline has passed, it is not too late to file for your economic stimulus payment this year. Persons who qualify for the payment must file a 2007 tax return by **October 15, 2008**. Millions of people are eligible but may not know it, or think it is too late to get a payment. These are certain retirees, disabled veterans and low-wage workers who normally don't file a tax return because their income is too low or nontaxable. This year, they must file to receive their stimulus payment.

More than 400 IRS Taxpayer Assistance Centers are open weekdays offering free tax preparation and filing for individuals and families whose income is \$40,000 or less and those filing a tax return solely to receive the economic stimulus payment. To find an IRS office near you, go to www.irs.gov and click on "Contact IRS," then "Contact Your Local IRS Office." A select number of volunteer tax assistance sites in local communities may also remain open providing free help. Call 1-800-906-9887 to find the nearest volunteer tax assistance site.

Update on ADA Restoration Act

A letter signed by faith-based organizations went to Senate and House offices in April in support of the ADA Restoration Act. Excerpts from the letter: "Sacred texts from our diverse faith traditions agree upon the inherent value and sacredness of every human being, regardless of physical or mental ability. Our traditions teach us of our moral obligation to provide assistance to those in need, ensuring equal access for all people and helping facilitate the full participation of individuals with disabilities in our communities. We are committed to eradicating all forms of discrimination and intolerance, which alienate individuals and divide our society. We believe that the restoration of civil rights to the disabled community is of crucial importance to this struggle."

The Restoration Act, if passed, will remedy the absurd Catch-22 created by the legal system which now allows employers to say a person is "too disabled" to do the job but not "disabled enough" to be protected by the law:

- People with conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, HIV, cancer, hearing loss, and mental illness who manage their disabilities with medication, prosthetics, hearing aids, etc. – or “mitigating measures” – are viewed as “too functional” to have a disability and are denied the ADA’s protection from employment discrimination.
- People denied a job or fired because an employer mistakenly believes they cannot perform the job – or because the employer does not want “people like that” in the workplace – are also denied the ADA’s protection from employment discrimination

The ADA Restoration Act (H.R. 3195/S. 1881) ensures the right to be judged based on performance. It restores the original intent of Congress, harmonizing the ADA with other civil rights laws and requiring the courts to interpret the law fairly.

For more information on the bill, go to www.c-c-d.org/task_forces/rights/tf-rights-ada.htm .

New Web Community Brings Together Parents of Children with Visual Disabilities

When parents learn their child has a visual impairment, it can be overwhelming. Parents wonder, "Will my child fall behind at school?" or "Will my child make friends?" or "Will my child have a successful career?" With only 93,600 visually impaired school-aged children in the U.S., over half of whom have additional disabilities, it's easy for families facing vision loss to feel alone.

To help these families connect with each other and give busy parents, grandparents and other caretakers a place to find comprehensive resources and support 24 hours a day, the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) and the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) have launched FamilyConnect™, an online, multimedia community for parents and guardians of children with visual impairments. Located at www.familyconnect.org, FamilyConnect gives parents access to message boards where they can talk to other parents, compelling videos featuring real-life families, parenting articles, a mom-authored blog, a glossary of more than 30 eye conditions, and links to local resources. The site also features sections dedicated to multiple disabilities, technology, education, and every age group from infants to teens.

Rite Aid to Make Website and Point of Sale Equipment Accessible

On May 1, Rite Aid announced a nationwide accessibility initiative for Rite Aid customers with visual impairments and other disabilities. Rite Aid will ensure its Web site meets guidelines issued by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) of the [World Wide Web Consortium \(w3c\)](http://www.w3.org/). Rite Aid has also begun installing new point-of-sale equipment with tactile keypads to protect the privacy and security of all shoppers who have difficulty entering numbers on a flat screen. The initiative is the result of collaboration between Rite Aid and major organizations including the American Foundation for the Blind, American Council of the Blind and the California Council of the Blind. The drugstore chain has more than 5,000 stores in 31 states and the

District of Columbia and 2008 annual revenues of more than \$24 billion. Read the [press release](#) and settlement agreement.

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