



Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Bulletin

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

Empowerment! Opportunity! Justice!

February- March, 2010

To include information in next month’s Bulletin please contact us!

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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

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

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

Public Hearing on Visitability

The Housing Committee of the State General Assembly will hold a public hearing on “visitability” on March 4 at 1:00 pm in Room 1A of the Legislative Office Building in Hartford.

What is visitability? Visitability is when a single family home has:

- One zero step entrance at front, rear, or side of house
- 32” clear width doorways and 36” wide halls throughout the main floor
- A bath on the main floor that provides access to toilet and sink

In essence, visitability is a movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes - not merely those custom-built for occupants who currently have disabilities - offer a few specific features that make the home easier for people who develop mobility disabilities to live in, and to make it possible for them to visit family and friends.

The spirit of visitability is as important as the list of features. That spirit says it's not just unwise but unacceptable that new homes continue to be built with barriers - unacceptable, given how easy it is to build basic access in the great majority of new homes, and unacceptable given the harsh effects major barriers have on so many people's lives, especially the ever-increasing population of those who are aging in place. These easily-avoided barriers cause unsafe living conditions, social isolation, and forced institutionalization.

For more information call Sue Salters at Independence Unlimited – 860-523-5021. The visitability initiative is being promoted by the North Central Disability Advocacy Network which is an arm of Independence Unlimited and supported by the statewide Disability Advocacy Collaborative.

The State General Assembly is in Session

The 2010 session of the Connecticut General Assembly convened on February 3rd. The overriding issue this year will be the same as last – the state budget. Latest projections show expected state income falling \$500 million short of expenses. The Governor has submitted a plan to address the shortfall, and now it's the legislature's turn to take action. The Governor has called for further budget reductions that will seriously impact the ability of individuals with disabilities, including elders, to live independently. In addition to a reduction in services provided by state agencies, independent living centers, the Brain Injury Association, the Commission on Aging, and similar agencies are fighting for survival. How will the legislature respond?

To make your voice heard, you can reach the Office of the Governor at: (860) 566-4840 - Toll-Free: (800) 406-1527 - TDD: (860) 524-7397 - Email: Governor.Rell@ct.gov

You can reach your legislators by calling:

House Democrats: (800) 842.8267	House Republicans: (800) 842.1423
Senate Democrats: (800) 842.1420	Senate Republicans: (800) 842.1421

You can reach legislative leaders by calling:

Speaker of the House Chris Donovan, (860) 240-8500, 1-800-842-1902 or Christopher.Donovan@cga.ct.gov

House Majority Leader Denise Merrill, (860) 240-8500, 1-800-842-8267 or Denise.Merrill@cga.ct.gov

Senate President Donald Williams, (860) 240-8600, 1-800-842-1420 or Williams@senatedems.ct.gov

Senate Majority Leader Martin Looney, (860) 240-8600, 1-800-842-1420 or Looney@senatedems.ct.gov

Senator Toni Harp, Appropriations Committee co-chair, (860) 240-0393 or harp@senatedems.ct.gov

Rep. John Geragosian, Appropriations Committee co-chair, (860) 240-0394 or john.geragosian@cga.ct.gov

Your Help Needed to Change a Very Important State Statute

Mary Ann Langton of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities makes the below request to all disability rights advocates:

“The Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services joined forces after the CT Post newspaper featured an article entitled “Robbing Defenseless of All Meaning.” The article was about a man who was accused of sexually assaulting a woman with developmental disabilities. In 2008, he was found guilty by a jury of his peers in CT Superior Court. That verdict was overturned by the State’s Court of Appeals in

2009, on the basis that the victim could not be considered physically helpless by the current definition of law.

Although the victim could hardly move any part of her body she hypothetical possessed the ability to communicate “no” if not verbally, then behaviorally. According to CT law, a ‘physically helpless’ person is defined as an individual who is ‘unconscious or for any other reason is physically unable to communicate unwillingness to an act.’ [CGS 53a-65(6)]. This definition does not take into account many types of impairments which impede a person with a disability’s ability to process, react, and communicate their consent in the same time frame that people without disabilities can.

The State Legislature’s Human Services Committee unanimously voted to raise ”An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of a Developmentally Disabled or Severely Disabled Person.” This is based on a current law in the State of Ohio and will amend the legal definition of physical helplessness as being ‘unable to communicate willingness to act’ in order to place the onus of obtaining consent on the initiator to act. Within the next few days, the Human Services Committee will assign a number to this bill, and the hearing date will be held in the next few weeks. YOU ARE NEEDED at the hearing, and to present your testimony on the importance of changing the Physically Helplessness State Statute. If you are unable to attend the hearing, please take a moment to write to your legislators to express the importance of redefining physical helplessness. Share a personal story of why this change is important to you.

Please call or e-mail Mary-Ann Langton to confirm your attendance at the hearing or for additional information. Mary-Ann can be reached at 860-418-6160 or mary.ann.langton@ct.gov.”

CACLD Presents “Let’s Talk”

My child has a Learning Disability. What should I do? The Connecticut Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (CACLD) is offering a series of workshops on special education. The series is designed to help parents find out how to maximize their child's potential. Three sessions will be offered in March, with all sessions running from 10:30 am - 12 noon. Each session is limited to 10 participants:

- Tuesday, March 2- Know Your Child: What do the tests say about your child?
- Tuesday, March 16- Know the Law: What do the Federal and State laws mandate?
- Tuesday, March 23- Know the School: How can I be sure the school is meeting my child's needs?

The presenter for all sessions will be Rena Schine, Ph.D., School Psychologist and Parent Advocate. All sessions will take place at CACLD, 25 Van Zant Street, Suite 15-5, East Norwalk. The series is free, but registration is required. Call 203-838-5010 or email cauld@optonline.net to reserve your spot.

ASCONN's 20th Annual Conference on Autism

The Autism Society of Connecticut will hold its 20th Annual Conference on Saturday, April 24 at the Hartford Marriot Downtown. Back by popular demand is Temple Grandin, arguably the most famous person with autism in America. She will speak on growing up and living with autism, her struggles, challenges and triumphs and most particularly on how we can help our loved ones with autism to utilize their talents and strengths and lead successful, happy and productive lives.

Also on the bill is, Dr. Peter Gerhardt, President of the Organization for Autism Research. OAR is dedicated to the promotion of applied research and dissemination of evidenced based information.

Additional information can be found at www.asconn.org.

New Website for Behavioral Health

The State of Connecticut now has a website called the Network of Care for Behavioral Health. It was established through CT's Mental Health Transformation Initiative to provide information regarding advocacy, housing, food, child and family behavioral health, disability services, health and dental, legal services, veterans' services, support groups and more. The Network of Care has a searchable database, a community calendar to add events, newsletters, and fact sheets available in several different languages.

To access this site visit: <http://connecticut.networkofcare.org/mh/home/index.cfm>.

New Offering from DSS

The State of Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) oversee several housing subsidy programs. Under these programs, tenants with limited income receive a subsidy to help them pay a portion of their rent. Typically, the subsidy will pay up to 70% of the rent with the tenant or tenant family responsible for the remaining 30 percent. When a tenant or their family member has an increase in their monthly income, including increases from earned income or wages, their tenant share of rent goes up.

Now for the first time, the Department of Social Services is joining with HUD's existing "Earned Income Disregard" to allow certain qualifying tenants whose housing is subsidized through the RAP program to work without an immediate increase in rent. For more information about the Rental Assistance Program's (RAP) new work incentive program, contact: Mary Cattanach, Department of Social Services: mary.cattanach@ct.gov or telephone: (860) 424-5860.

CT Family Support Council Family Support Survey

The CT Family Support Council has undertaken a survey about parents' experience with receiving state or state funded services and supports for your child. It is a voluntary and anonymous survey; you do not have to provide any identifying health information. To complete the survey go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/92G6FHY> .

For more information about the survey contact Moira O'Neill representing the Office of the Child Advocate on the CT Family Support Council at 860-566-2106.

Family Support Council's Annual Meet and Greet

The CT Family Support Council and Network are inviting all families raising children with disabilities, providers, and friends to attend their annual Meet & Greet Legislative Breakfast to be held on Wednesday morning, March 3, at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. Children are welcome to attend with their families.

The Council and Network are also looking for two parents or caregivers of a child or children with disabilities from each CT Family Support Network region to speak in a three-minute testimony on how Connecticut's budget cuts will impact their children and family. Stipends for childcare/transportation will be offered to the parents who speak. Attendees are encouraged to contact their local representative/state senator and invite them to attend. The web link to find your representative/senator name and contact information is <http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/CGAFindLeg.asp> . If you are not sure how to approach your legislators or what to say when you call or email them, CT Family Support Council and Network members can help with this. If you need help writing and/or practicing telling your story, you are welcome to email Alice Buttwell at Alicemmbb@aol.com.

Transportation News

The following information is provided by Connect-Ability, a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) being administered by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services:

Accessible Taxis: After many years of advocacy, distribution of Connect-Ability issue briefs on the need for accessible taxis, recommendations to the Governor and the Connecticut Department of Transportation and hours of meetings with taxi providers, Connecticut now has its first wheelchair accessible taxi, fulfilling the dream of people with disabilities and their advocates. In October, 2009 the City of New Haven's Department of Persons with Disabilities along with MetroTaxi, the state's largest full-service taxi company, jointly launched Connecticut's first wheelchair accessible cab. Supported by recently passed state legislation permitting this type of wheelchair accessible taxi cab, around the clock service to customers who use wheelchairs and scooters within New Haven is now available.

Getting on Board Transportation Guides: Connect-Ability, in partnership with Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) and RideShare developed the Getting On Board accessible transportation guides for the Eastern and North Central regions of the state. Similar

guides are currently available in the Northwestern, South Central and Southwestern regions of the state. These guides will be available through transit districts; state agencies; libraries; schools; Para transit providers; hospitals; colleges; Chambers of Commerce and other organizations. To request hard copies, contact Glendine Henry at (86) 424-5543 or download the guides from the connect-ability website at http://www.connect-ability.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=109&Itemid=528

Cost Calculator – The True Cost of Driving – How Much Does It really Cost You To drive To Work? This calculator will help compare the price of using public transportation with purchasing/driving a car. When considering the cost of driving, most people think only about how much they pay for gas. Other considerations include the cost of purchasing and maintaining a car or van, including tune-ups, oil and tires, as well as insurance, registration, and parking.

To use the calculator click on the following link: http://connect-ability.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=111&Itemid=533

Web-based Trip Planner: The trip planner was developed in partnership with CTTRANSIT and Connecticut Department of Transportation to help individuals plan their next bus trip. The trip planner can be used to find maps and schedules for the Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Stamford bus routes by simply entering a starting and ending location or address.

Individuals can also look up the schedule for a specific route, locate the stops nearest starting and ending locations, and determine when the next scheduled bus will serve that location. The Sort Results by drop-down menu enables individuals to optimize their search results by:

- Trip Time - sorts by the shortest trip
- Number of Transfers - sorts by the fewest transfers
- Walking Distance - sorts by the shortest walking distance

To begin planning your next bus trip click: <http://www.cttransit.com/tripplanner/>.

News from the CT Tech Act Project

In 2009, CTTAP opened a new Assistive Technology Demonstration Center in Willimantic. The Eastern Connecticut Assistive Technology Center is open two days a week for individuals with disabilities, family members, employers and educators to be able to view a variety of AT and make an informed decision about the AT that can help to remove or reduce barriers at work, at school or in the community. Call 860-423-8400 ext. 319 for more information on hours of operation or to schedule an appointment.

March 8-12 is MS Awareness Week

The Connecticut Chapter of the National MS Society will hold its Annual Meeting on Sunday, March 7, at the Hartford Marriott in Rocky Hill, where the Society will kick off MS Awareness Week (Monday, March 8, through Sunday, March 14). The event features the chapter's annual awards ceremony, recognizing dedicated individuals going above and beyond to fight MS.

For more information on Annual Meeting and MS Awareness Week, go to <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/chapters/CTN/take-action/ms-awareness-week/index.aspx>.

Paralympics Coming to Vancouver

The Vancouver 2010 Paralympics begin on March 12. The schedule of events includes the Biathlon, Alpine Skiing, Wheelchair Curling, Ice Sledge Hockey, Cross Country Skiing and other events that will run through March 21st. For more information on the competition go to <http://www.vancouver2010.com/paralympic-games/>.

BLN to Host Employment Conference and Fair

On Friday May 7, the Connecticut Business Leadership Network will host an Employment Conference & Career Fair at Manchester Community College. The Employment Conference will run from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm, with the Career Fair following from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm. There will be tracks for jobseekers and for employers, and workshops will be offered on topics such as reasonable accommodation, ADA Compliance, and interviewing skills. For more information contact Melissa Marshall, BLN Executive Director at (860)-561-1232, melissa.marshall@snet.net, or visit the BLN website: www.ctbln.com

The 2010 Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad Seminar set for April 12

The 2010 Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad Seminar will be held on Monday, April 12 from 3:30 – 6:30 pm at the Great Path Academy Community Commons Room (2nd floor) at Manchester Community College. The focus of this year's seminar is the positive role of the arts in the lives of all of us, especially children and adults with disabilities. The artwork of invited guest artists with disabilities will be highlighted. Each of the artists will share how art has enriched their lives and in some cases has become a career giving them meaning and income. Our guest speaker/facilitator is well known local artist and MCC Adjunct Faculty member, Linda Bradley.

There is no fee to attend the seminar, but if you plan to attend, you are requested to pre-register for the event by April 2. This Seminar is funded by the MCC Institute on Disability & Community Inclusion/Dybwad Fund. To register or to get more information call 860-512-2789 or e-mail bevjackson02@att.net.

NAMI-CT Walk 2010

The NAMI-CT WALK 2010 “to change the face of mental illness” will take place on Saturday May 15, 2010 at Bushnell Park in downtown Hartford. Registration is scheduled for 9:00 am and the walk will start at 10:00 am. The goal is to raise \$165,000. The NAMI Walks Kick-Off Luncheon will be held on Tuesday, March 16 from 11:30-1:00 pm at the Pond House in Elizabeth Park, West Hartford.

Connecticut (NAMI-CT) is the only state organization affiliated with the nation's leading grassroots family and consumer organization – the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). The organization offers support, education, and advocacy services to people living with psychiatric conditions, family members, friends, professionals and the public at large.

If you have questions e-mail Janice at resources@namict.org or Iris at membership@namict.org. You may also call 1-800-215-3021.

Housing-Transportation-Environment Forum Date Change

The Partnership for Strong Communities has announced that Wednesday, March 10 is the new date for the originally scheduled February 24 Housing Policy Series forum - "Housing, Transportation & The Environment: The Convergence of Transit, Green Building and Brownfield Remediation." Conflicts for some of the participants forced the postponement.

More information as well as copies of the annual report of the 2009 Housing Policy Series, "Housing: The Hub of Public Policy," can be found at www.housingpolicy2010.org.

SILC Announces 2010 Meeting Schedule

The State Independent Living Council (SILC) has announced its meeting schedule for 2010. All meetings run from 1:00 – 3:30 pm, and the public is invited to attend:

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31 – Center for Disability Rights, West Haven
WEDNESDAY, MAY 26 – New Park Office and Conference Center - Hartford
WEDNESDAY, JULY 28 - Center for Disability Rights, West Haven
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 – location to be determined
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17 - New Park Office and Conference Center - Hartford

For more information about the SILC call (860) 523-0126 in Hartford or e-mail Debbie Melaragno at deb.ctsilc@gmail.com.

Vision Open House at DRC/FC

The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County, the NEAT Marketplace at Oak Hill, and Vision Dynamics will host an Open House on Tuesday, March 30, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Disability Resource Center (80 Ferry Boulevard, Suite 210 - Stratford, CT 06615). The event presents an opportunity to learn about the latest equipment, services and assistive technology that is currently available for people who are blind or visually impaired.

To register, call 203-378-6977, or email info@drcfc.org. Seating is limited.

Defending our Freedom

Eleven years ago, in the Olmstead decision, the Supreme Court said that Americans with disabilities have the right to live in the most integrated setting. Yet today, states are responding to budget shortfalls by drastically cutting home and community-based services. These draconian cuts are forcing seniors and people with disabilities into nursing facilities and other institutional settings because they don't have the services they need in the community to remain independent. As states cut vital services, the federal government, which is charged with protecting our civil rights and enforcing the law, is simply standing by - silent - while Americans with disabilities have their most basic freedoms taken away by the states.

The disability community cannot sit by as our freedom is negotiated away in back room budget deals. We must take action!

Defending Our Freedom is a three-prong national campaign initiated by ADAPT to organize the disability community to:

- Demand that the Obama administration fulfill its duty to aggressively protect the civil rights of disabled Americans and enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act/Olmstead decision;
- File complaints with the Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice that document the violation of rights of individuals who have been forced into institutional settings, denied community services, or have had their community services reduced as well as complaints that document the state policies and budget cuts that violate our rights; and
- Document the disability community's efforts to fight back against state cuts so that we can learn from each other's efforts, rally others to join our fight, and hold public officials accountable when they do not support our freedom.

You can keep up on what groups are doing by reading the blog:
www.defendingourfreedom2010.blogspot.com .

National Health Care Reform

It is unclear at the present time what direction health care reform will take. The President is continuing to pursue the issue and has begun reaching across the aisle to attract Republican Congressmen and women in order create a compromise agreement.

Some of the issues still on the table that have special meaning for individuals with disabilities and families include:

- Major insurance market reforms including elimination of pre-existing condition exclusions and annual and lifetime caps;

- Coverage of rehabilitation and habilitation services and devices in the essential benefits package for the new insurance Exchange;
- An expansion of Medicaid eligibility up to 133% of the federal poverty level;
- The Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act which will establish a new nation-wide long term services insurance program that will help individuals and their families meet their needs without needing to be impoverished;
- The Community First Choice (CFC) Medicaid option which will make comprehensive community-based services available to Medicaid beneficiaries in states which chose the option (it would begin on Oct 1, 2010 with no sunset date); and
- Requiring the development of standards for accessible diagnostic and other medical equipment

Whatever your priorities may be, let your elected officials know how you feel. Call Senator Dodd and Senator Lieberman and let them know your thoughts. The toll free number is (800) 958-5374. The best time to call is between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm.

Fellowship Opportunity in DC

The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation is seeking exemplary professionals and/or family members of persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities who are currently working or volunteering in the field of inclusive services and supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for an intensive one-year Public Policy Fellowship in Washington, D.C. For more information go to:

<http://jfactivist.typepad.com/files/publicpolicyfellowshipannouncement2010-2011.pdf>

Application Deadline: March 5, 2010

Need Help with Your Taxes?

It's income tax season and once again United Way of Connecticut (UWC) is providing information on tax credits, free income tax assistance and tax forms. UWC is participating in the Tax Credit Outreach Campaign to inform and educate families about their eligibility for federal tax credits. 2-1-1 will provide information on the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

To learn more or for a referral to a free tax preparation site dial 2-1-1 or visit

www.ctunitedway.org/taxes.

Social Security News

On February 11, the Social Security Administration announced an addition of 38 new conditions to its list of conditions for the Compassionate Allowance (CA) initiative, including early onset Alzheimer's. The CA initiative makes it possible for SSA to expedite favorable disability decisions for people who apply for disability benefits based on documented diagnosis of listed disabling conditions. The initiative not only assists those whose applications are quickly processed, but also assists those whose applications need more time and attention from SSA

adjudicators because staff time is freed up to address the applications which need more time. The Arc and UCP, with colleagues in the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), will continue working with Commissioner Astrue on further expansion of this decision-making tool and other ways to expedite decisions for disability claims.

For a copy of the press release and a list of the 38 new conditions, see:

<http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/pr/cal021110-pr.html>

Abilities Expo in NJ in May

The 2010 New York Metro Abilities Expo will again be held at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center from May 21 – 23. Friday’s opening day will run from 11 am – 5 pm, Saturday’s schedule is from 10 am – 5 pm, and Sunday from 11 am – 4 pm.

For more than three decades, Abilities Expo has succeeded in improving the lives of Americans with disabilities, their families, caregivers and healthcare professionals. The unique forum features three days of cutting-edge products and services, compelling workshops, fun-for-the-whole-family activities and has become the leading event for the community of people with disabilities.

Abilities Expo reaches out to all ages and all sectors of the community including wounded veterans, persons recovering from immobilizing accidents, seniors with age-related health concerns, children with disabilities, individuals with mobility and spinal issues, people who have vision and hearing impairments, people with developmental disabilities and many more.

For more information go to: www.abilitiesexpo.com/newyork/index.html.

National Self Advocacy Conference Set for Kansas City

The SABE National Self-Advocacy Conference will be held in Kansas City on September 16-19. The registration cost is \$375 which includes all conference activities and 8 meals (dinner on Thursday, all meals on Friday and Saturday and brunch on Sunday).

You may sign-up to receive updates about presenting a workshop, registering, budgeting, and more at www.sabekc2010.org . Everyone that signs up will get email updates as details are finalized for the conference.

If you have any questions or you want a flyer of the “save the date” that you can print off and mail, email hilesr@umkc.edu.

For four years the Collaborative was supported in a number of different ways by Communitas, Inc. To George, Pat and Bev we extend our deep appreciation.