

## **On Target**

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues  
Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities  
March 2008

Volume 21 Number 2

## **Indiana celebrates Disability Awareness Month**

Hoosiers across the state are building awareness and shaping attitudes as they celebrate Disability Awareness Month this March, orchestrated by the Governor's Council and themed "Attitude is Everything." Both Indiana University Kokomo (IUK) and the Northwest Indiana Special Education Cooperative (NISEC) were honored with the Council's Community Spirit Award for their outstanding 2007 campaigns. These groups are continuing efforts this year.

IUK is hosting a series of events for students and the Kokomo community. On March 18, students can participate in "Walk in My Shoes," in which they will briefly experience life with a disability through simulation exercises and also test accessibility on campus. That same day, Pat Rogan from Indiana University School of Education in Indianapolis will host a workshop for students, "Transitioning from school to adult life," to discuss resources available for helping students with disabilities move from college to the workforce.

IUK's Early Outreach Program will also host events to begin building positive attitudes at a young age, including "totes for tots." With this program, children receive tote bags filled with items about disabilities and a newsletter to educate parents about how "Attitude is Everything." In conjunction with the university's other events March 18, Early Outreach will host "Little Learners" story time for children in its daycare center.

Also targeting students this year is NISEC. For the past decade, the group has worked to involve all 61 Lake County public schools in Disability Awareness Month. This March, each school will participate in a variety of activities to raise awareness among children and teens.

At Merrillville High School, students with severe disabilities worked with Very Special Arts (VSA) in Indiana's northwest region to create plaques to display in the school throughout the month. Joe Powers of VSA offered direction and guidance to help students complete their artwork, but wanted the students' projects to reflect their own creative ideas. "I'm a big advocate for the least amount of assistance needed for a student," said Powers.

In the School City of Hobart district, high school students with disabilities will make presentations to students at Joan Martin Elementary School. "This opportunity helps boost self-esteem in the high school students, while helping the younger students better understand disabilities," said Patricia Pierce from NISEC. Additionally, a Lake County teacher who trains assistance dogs for people who are blind will make demonstrations to students at Warren Elementary and Polk Elementary schools.

In addition to IUK and NISEC, Hoosiers are making great strides to influence positive attitudes about and perceptions of people with disabilities in Indiana communities. Look for evaluation results of the 2008 Disability Awareness Month campaign in a future issue of "On Target."

## **Two Indiana communities finalists for 2007 Accessible America Contest**

The National Organization on Disability (NOD) named two Indiana communities among the nine nationwide finalists for the 2007 Accessible America Contest. Indianapolis and Bloomington were selected for their exceptional commitment to offer people with disabilities full and equal opportunities, including access to jobs, education, religious worship, voting, transportation, housing, emergency preparedness, and the entire range of social, recreational, cultural and sports activities.

Indianapolis prides itself on surpassing the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and points to The Cultural Trail as a recent example. This world-class urban path will connect neighborhoods, cultural districts and entertainment amenities, and includes such features as wide sidewalks, auditory pedestrian signals and tactile cues for persons with visual disabilities, clear signage, and resting spots for persons with mobility disabilities.

Bloomington's "Community Capacity Plan" was adopted several years ago to assure that people with disabilities participate fully in the life and activities of the community, including accessible communication and public transportation.

The seven other finalists included Alexandria, Va.; Columbus, Ga., Hattiesburg, Miss.; Houston, Texas; Miami-Dade County, Fla.; New Haven, Conn.; and Sioux Falls, S.D. Houston, which was named the winning community in early February, received a \$25,000 cash prize, which NOD awards to encourage further advancement of local disability-related efforts.

## **Voter ID law before the U.S. Supreme Court**

Indiana's voter identification law has taken center stage in what many consider to be the most important U.S. Supreme Court decision since *Bush v. Gore* in 2000.

In 2005, Indiana's General Assembly passed a law requiring voters to show government-issued identification before casting their ballots. Although the case focuses on Indiana, 27 other states have passed similar laws in an effort to control voter fraud.

Supporters note that identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States and that the Bureau of Motor Vehicles is required to provide free photo identification to citizens who cannot afford one.

"Just as we now take precautions to prevent ourselves from becoming victims of identity theft when making everyday transactions," said Secretary of State Todd Rokita, "Simply showing one of several government-issued IDs before voting protects our most sacred civic transaction — one person, one vote."

Critics feel that the voter ID law disproportionately affects low-income, minority and elderly voters because these individuals are least likely to meet ID requirements. In a telephone survey conducted in 2007 by the Washington Institute for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, about 88 percent of registered voters making at least \$40,000 a year had current ID, compared with 82 percent of individuals earning less than \$40,000.

If you've experienced voting problems due to current identification requirements, national media may be interested in your story. If you are willing to share your experience, please contact Jim Dickson, American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), at (800) 840-8844 (toll free) or [james.charles.dickson@gmail.com](mailto:james.charles.dickson@gmail.com).

Watch for updates about the court's decision in future issues of "On Target." □

## **UCP releases "The State of Disability in America"**

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), in partnership with the Life Without Limits Project, recently released "The State of Disability in America." This report documents the progress and challenges experienced by the 54 million Americans with disabilities (about 19 percent of the U.S. population) with regard to civil rights, health care, education, employment and housing.

The report discusses legislative successes, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which protect people from discrimination on the basis of disability. Despite noting progress, the authors state that work is still necessary as "courts have weakened many protections contained in the ADA."

Federal health care programs, including Medicaid and Medicare, were also addressed in the report, noting that eligible recipients often must fall at or below the poverty line. "While becoming more and more supportive of community-based services, the current structures of these government programs leave most beneficiaries with disabilities without the ability to lift themselves out of poverty without losing critical benefits."

Additionally, private health care is not always available as disabilities are often diagnosed as "pre-existing conditions" or insurance companies do not offer full coverage.

The report notes progress made toward educational opportunities for children with disabilities, especially through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Children are provided an environment, at any age, to help them better develop mentally, physically and socially. Educators are better trained to meet the individual needs of each child. However, people with disabilities remain below national averages for graduation, college admissions and employment rates.

The report also notes the gradual transition toward home- and community-based services versus institutionalized living. However, because a large percentage of individuals and families with disabilities live at or under the poverty line, affordable and safe housing can be hard to access.

To view the full report, visit [www.ucp.org](http://www.ucp.org).

## **Joint study shows growing employment gap**

A joint study by Cornell University and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) reports there are increasingly fewer people with disabilities in the workforce relative to

the total number of people employed. The 2003–2004 study shows that only about 38 percent of people with disabilities between the ages of 21–64 are employed, compared to about 78 percent of people without disabilities.

According to the report, the “employment gap” between those with disabilities in the workforce and those without disabilities was 40.3 percent, an increase of 0.6 percent over the previous year’s figures.

The report also showed a greater rise in the poverty rate for people with disabilities compared to those without. On average, people with disabilities are making about \$6,000 less annually for full-time work than people without disabilities.

Some Cornell researchers are investigating whether the employment gap may be due, in part, to what they call the “poverty trap.” Under current federal rules, people with disabilities must be essentially unemployed to receive government benefits, but the support they receive isn’t enough to keep them out of poverty.

Another contributing factor could be the presence of discrimination against people with disabilities in the workforce, an issue recently addressed by Thomas Bowman, a member of the Community Council on Disability Awareness, in a column for the “Palladium-Item” in Richmond, Ind. “To deny anyone who has a desire to work is total discrimination against that person’s inalienable rights,” wrote Bowman. “Employers need to come to the realization that many disabled people can work if given the chance.”

The article also reported the difficulties Jane Zimmerman, an employment consultant for people with disabilities, faces with some employers. “It is challenging because of preconceived notions that a disabled person may be less productive,” she said in the article.

Cornell’s Annual Disability Status Reports will be released each October and contain a range of statistics about people with disabilities, including statistics by state. The first annual report is available online at [www.DisabilityStatistics.org](http://www.DisabilityStatistics.org).

## **Indiana programs seek to improve health care**

With 47 million Americans uninsured and countless others underinsured, health care is no doubt a national crisis. Many states are addressing health care reform on their own and various Indiana organizations are seeking solutions for Hoosiers.

The Indiana University Workgroup on Healthcare Reform was established by the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to develop public policy recommendations and influence change in Indiana’s health care laws. Commissioned by Indiana’s Family & Social Services Administration (FSSA), the workgroup has conducted in-depth research on the state of Indiana’s current health care system, including a “listening tour” to solicit input from community members. The workgroup is currently in its final phase preparing to make presentations and deliver information to various legislators and other key decision makers.

Also seeking change is Hoosiers for a Commonsense Health Plan, a group of Indiana citizens who support a publicly financed, privately delivered, universal health plan at the state and national levels.

“People with disabilities are often forced to limit their potential to remain at a certain income level so they are eligible for Medicaid, as many do not qualify for private insurance,” said Cindy Calley, a health care advocate who volunteers for Hoosiers for a Commonsense Health Plan. “However, most health care providers do not accept Medicaid because it pays out so little.”

For more information about these groups, visit [www.healthcarereform.iupui.edu](http://www.healthcarereform.iupui.edu). and [www.hchp.info/index.html](http://www.hchp.info/index.html).

## **FSSA launches Developmental Disabilities Crisis Management Services for all who qualify**

Indiana’s Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) recently implemented a new statewide support program for individuals with developmental disabilities who experience extreme behavioral or psychiatric issues. The program, available as of Sept. 17, 2007, is designed to help all children and adults who qualify, regardless of whether they currently receive services. Specific support services include 24-hour Crisis Hotline phone support, in-home assessments, technical assistance and behavior intervention, out-of-home intervention (on a short-term basis) and post-crisis support.

Parents, guardians and service providers can make referrals by calling the Crisis Management Services office located in their region. Crisis specialists will determine if immediate assessment at a local hospital or at home is needed. After the initial meeting, needs are identified and individualized referrals, assistance and resources will be offered.

Contact information for the three Crisis Management offices is:

North: (866) 416-4774

Central: (866) 920-3272

South: (866) 416-4774

For a complete list of counties in each region, please visit [www.in.gov/fssa](http://www.in.gov/fssa).

## **Of Note**

### ***Awareness month evaluations due soon***

Your feedback on the 2008 campaign, as well as your participants’ feedback on events or activities, is important to the Council. Please complete the coordinator evaluation form delivered with your materials, and have participants complete that evaluation at the end of each activity.

Both can be mailed or faxed to the following: Borshoff, 47 S. Pennsylvania St., Suite 500, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204 or (317) 631-6499 (fax).

### ***Mall advertising for awareness month***

The following shopping malls have Disability Awareness Month standing displays outside their children's play areas during March: Greenwood Park, Castleton Square, University Park, Muncie, Eastland and Tippecanoe. This effort is to further promote the message of inclusion and build awareness about people with disabilities.

### ***Register to vote by April 7***

Monday, April 7, is the registration deadline for voting in Indiana's primary election May 6. To register or update your current registration, visit [www.in.gov/sos/elections/vote\\_reg.html](http://www.in.gov/sos/elections/vote_reg.html). Complete the Voter Registration Form and return it to your county's voter registration office or the Indiana Election Division. You may also register by visiting your county voter registration or clerk's office, any BMV license branch or public assistance office. Once you've registered, visit [www.indianavoters.com](http://www.indianavoters.com) to locate the polling place where you will cast your ballot on Election Day.

### ***Nominations open for Community Spirit Awards***

The Governor's Council is now accepting nominations for the 2008 Community Spirit Awards for both distinguished leadership and outstanding Disability Awareness Month campaigns. To nominate an individual or group, visit [www.in.gov/gpcpd](http://www.in.gov/gpcpd) and click on "Council Projects."

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.