

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues
Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities
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2008 Disability Policy Seminar report

Already, 2008 has been an intense year of politics. With three widely popular candidates vying for the presidency, and the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate up for re-election, it is an important year for voters. The disability community is one group speaking up during this crucial time, and Capitol Hill recently received a unified message from participants in this year's Disability Policy Seminar about the various public policy concerns for people with disabilities.

From March 2 to 4, participants gathered at the Hyatt Regency in Washington, D.C., to view presentations and engage in discussions about legislative concerns for people with disabilities, including budget and appropriations, entitlements, the Developmental Disabilities Act, health, housing, Social Security, the Americans with Disabilities Act and employment. Attendees also learned about the value of voting and taking part in the political process. This year's seminar, "Advancing Disability Policy in an Election Year," culminated in a set of public policy recommendations, delivered to legislators March 4, which align with the interests of the nation's disability community.

To advance the interests of the disability community throughout the election year, the seminar taught participants about being strong advocates for people with disabilities. They received tools and tips for communicating with their legislators, such as using personal stories that fit the policy decision one might be promoting — a very powerful tactic. Self-advocacy was strongly encouraged, as individuals directly affected by public policy decisions have the loudest voice when competing for legislators' attention. In addition, participants learned about the power of community organizing and how rallying around a particular issue relates to voting. Because people with disabilities see eye-to-eye on many public policy concerns, more of these individuals need to vote so that legislative decisions are favorable to the disability community.

Locally, the Governor's Council provides similar advocacy training and tools through the Partners in Policymaking Academy (applications are currently being accepted for the next session — see the back page for more information) and through the "Legislative Process" booklet available on the Web site (www.in.gov/gpcpd) or by calling the Council at (866) 234-1635 (toll free) or (317) 232-7770 (voice).

The annual Disability Policy Seminar is a collaboration among the Arc of the United States, United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD), American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD). In addition to addressing the need for more people with disabilities to engage in the election process, the seminar delivered public policy updates and generated recommended next steps for those issues relevant to the disability community.

Long-term services and supports

Beginning January 2007, Section 6086 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) took effect to offer people with disabilities greater access to home- and community-based services (HCBS). This provision allows states to provide HCBS without using a waiver process and establishes stricter eligibility criteria for institutional services than for community-based services, which means states can now offer HCBS to people with disabilities who would not otherwise qualify for institutional services. To ensure optimal HCBS coverage, advocates are recommending eliminating the states' authority to cap services and maintain waiting lists, and their ability to limit services to certain sections of the state, among others.

Employment

Seminar participants discussed the growing unemployment rate for working-age people with disabilities, attributed to the many challenges these individuals face when searching for work. Advocates note that the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) program is significantly underfunded to meet the needs of people with disabilities trying to find work, as well as the need for greater access to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services. Legislation to reauthorize WIA and VR needs to be introduced in the 110th Congress to ensure accessibility and availability of services and continued funding.

Health and wellness

Health care is vital to people with disabilities, yet many barriers continue to limit access and availability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires medical offices to be accessible; however, medical equipment such as examination tables and chairs, diagnostic equipment and weight scales may not be. New legislation introduced during the 110th Congress, Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007, would reduce barriers to diagnostic equipment.

For more information about issues discussed during the seminar, such as Social Security and ADA restoration, visit the UCP or AAIDD Web sites at www.ucp.org or www.aaid.org.

New initiative will provide access to assistive technology

Through a contract with the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration/Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services, Easter Seals Crossroads recently became the statewide provider of INData, a new initiative that will help people with disabilities lead more independent lives through the use of technology.

INData will offer device demonstrations, device loans, computer recycling, equipment exchange and alternative financing for people with disabilities. In addition, the INData project offers assistive technology trainings and an annual conference (Sept. 26, 2008).

Quarterly trainings are currently offered at Easter Seals Crossroads in Indianapolis. In the future, trainings will also be made available through distance education. Additionally, trainings are offered to local universities, service clubs and other interested groups. The sessions cover a wide range of topics, including new and emerging assistive devices; technology designed to

increase independence in the home, at work or at school; advocacy; funding and clinical techniques.

“This program is one-of-a-kind in the state,” said Emily Abel, INData’s education and outreach coordinator. “There is a high demand for this kind of training. The feedback we received from the first quarterly training session on Augmentative and Alternative Communication was excellent; people thought it was very helpful.”

The next training session will be May 23 and will focus on assistive technology for individuals who are blind.

For more information, visit www.eastersealstech.com or call (888) 466-1314 (toll free).

Indiana launches internship program for students with disabilities

Indiana recently announced details of a new statewide pilot program designed to help high school students with disabilities find and secure internship opportunities. The initiative, Project SEARCH/Indiana, provides students with quality internships to help them build their résumés and gain experience in the workforce.

Project SEARCH/Indiana is off to a great start — it helped place five Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) students in internships this spring, and 10 to 12 additional students are expected to participate this fall. Although Project SEARCH/Indiana is currently available only in Marion County, organizers plan to expand its reach statewide throughout the year.

Several organizations have partnered to bring Project SEARCH/Indiana to local students, including the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Indiana University’s Institute on Disability and Community, Easter Seals Crossroads, Indianapolis Public Schools and Community Health Network.

In a press release issued by FSSA announcing the launch, Peter Bisbecos, director of the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services, said that he believes Project SEARCH/Indiana will provide needed and necessary skill sets to students with disabilities.

“Students going through the program will have an idea how to start finding a job and have established work habits by the time they graduate,” Bisbecos stated in the release.

Project SEARCH/Indiana is based on the Project SEARCH model developed by the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in the 1990s. The collaborative initiative has proved to be incredibly successful in other states including Ohio, Oregon and Colorado.

Many involved, locally and nationally, believe that Project SEARCH/Indiana is not only a benefit to students with disabilities, but also to employers seeking strong candidates.

According to Bisbecos’ comments in the FSSA release, “Companies should participate because they will be getting quality employees who tend to value their jobs and be more loyal than other workers. Many Project SEARCH employers have also experienced improved job retention, enhanced community image and increased customer satisfaction.”

To learn more about getting involved with Project SEARCH/Indiana, please call (800) 545-7763 (toll free) or visit www.in.gov/fssa.

Summer camps offer a unique opportunity

With summer nearly upon us, now is the time to be creative in finding ways to entertain school-age children during their three-month break.

A large number of parents turn to summer camps to help keep children both physically and mentally stimulated. There are many camps throughout the state available to children with and without disabilities. Camps that offer services to both children with and without disabilities provide a unique opportunity for children to learn about diversity, and to realize that “disability” doesn’t mean “not able.”

Regardless of the type of camp, however, it is important that parents of children with disabilities visit potential summer camps before enrollment to ensure their child will receive the necessary accommodations and is able to fully participate in camp activities. The American Camp Association recommends that parents ask camp representatives how many activities and events their child could participate in based on his/her needs, and what percentage of camp counselors have experience working with children with disabilities.

Summer camps, whether day or overnight, provide children the opportunity to build friendships and learn responsibility while independent of their parents. In addition, allowing children with and without disabilities to spend time together builds understanding and acceptance.

The Department of Education provides a list of approximately 35 summer camps for children with disabilities on its Web site at www.doe.state.in.us/exceptional/speced/whatsnew.html. The list includes camps’ contact information, costs, program specialties and more.

New report cites barriers in foster care system

According to the National Council on Disability (NCD), nearly 800,000 youth are involved in some aspect of the foster care system each year in the United States. Almost 13 percent of that population, ages 6–14, has at least one documented disability. It is this group that the NCD has found to be most vulnerable within the system.

With its recently published report, “Youth with Disabilities in the Foster Care System: Barriers to Success and Proposed Policy Solutions,” the NCD hopes to raise awareness about specific issues facing young people with disabilities in the foster care environment, as well as provide recommendations to policymakers for manageable improvements.

According to the report, there is little attention focused on the unique challenges youth with disabilities face in the foster care system, especially in regard to education, employment and general well-being.

This population of youth has specific characteristics that policymakers and caretakers need to be aware of in order to support them from childhood to adulthood. These include challenges people with disabilities face; special needs for safety, permanency, self-determination and self-sufficiency; enhanced quality of life and community integration; and existing programs and services that could be redesigned for better results.

To help combat these vulnerabilities among youth with disabilities in the foster care system, the NCD recommends improving coordination, holding systems accountable, developing leadership and capacity of the system to work more effectively for youth with disabilities, improving transitions to adulthood and educational outcomes, and enhancing data-sharing and information management.

According to the report, the American foster care system has made progress in recent years. However, there is still work to be done to guarantee the health and well-being of the children and youth it serves, including those with disabilities.

To learn more, call (202) 272-2004 (voice). The full report is available at www.ncd.gov.

New program helps Web site accessibility

The population of people who are blind is currently at 1.3 million and continues to grow as Americans age. The Internet serves as an essential tool for many, whether they use it for financial services, shopping or entertainment.

One group, the National Federation for the Blind, in partnership with Deque Systems, Inc., has launched a new program designed to recognize Web site and application developers who make special efforts to ensure their sites or applications are fully accessible to people with vision impairments.

The first of its kind, this certification program will help companies identify and remedy problems with their Web sites that may present barriers to people with vision impairments who are using assistive technology. Special software is available to translate what is on the screen into speech or Braille; however, some Web sites unintentionally create content that cannot be interpreted by this technology.

In the future, Web sites that have addressed all accessibility issues will receive a Nonvisual Access (NVA) Seal of Approval that is renewed on an annual basis if the Web site remains compliant with certification criteria.

Looking for this seal should help those people with visual impairments more readily identify which sites will be most accessible for them.

For more information, visit www.nfb.org or call (410) 659-9314, ext. 2413 (voice).

Of Note

Colts support Disability Awareness Month

This year's Disability Awareness Month materials were sponsored by the 2006 world-champion Indianapolis Colts. To further show their support for Hoosiers with disabilities, the Colts posted an article and image of the Disability Awareness Month poster on their Web site.

Statewide Transition Conference in August

The 2008 Indiana Statewide Transition Conference, "Paddle Your Own Canoe," will take place Aug. 6 and 7 at the Sheraton Hotel and Suites, 8787 Keystone Crossing, in Indianapolis. Nationally recognized speakers, other feature presenters and a number of learning sessions will teach successful strategies and practical ideas for advancing transition outcomes. Individuals involved with transition services — including transition-aged youth/young adults, family members, caregivers, school administrators, service providers and advocates — are invited to share their ideas, learn new strategies and network with others. Early registration deadline is June 16. Visit www.iidc.indiana.edu/cclc/ or call (812) 855-6508 (voice) to register.

Last call for Partners applications

If you want to be a stronger advocate for people with disabilities, now is the time to take advantage of the Council's Partners in Policymaking training academy. The program teaches leadership skills and techniques to develop positive partnerships with elected officials and other individuals who make policy decisions important to the disability community. To apply, contact the Council via phone or e-mail: (866) 234-1635 (toll free), (317) 232-7771 (voice) or PIP@gpcpd.org. Submit your completed applications to the Council by June 1, 2008.

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.