

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

ACDD*Advocate*

Volume VII Number 2, Summer 2012

With a grant from the Council—

Inclusive housing resource comes to Alabama



Visit ALHousingSearch.org for more information

THE FEDERAL DEFINITION OF *Developmental Disability*



A. The term “developmental disability” means a severe, chronic disability of an individual that is:

- attributable to a mental and/or physical impairment
- is manifested before the individual attains age 22
- is likely to continue indefinitely
- results in substantial functional limitations in 3 or more of the following areas of major life activity:
 - (1) self-care
 - (2) receptive and expressive language
 - (3) learning
 - (4) mobility
 - (5) self-direction
 - (6) capacity for independent living
 - (7) economic self-sufficiency
- reflects the individual’s need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated.

B. Infants and young children:

An individual from birth to age 9, inclusive, who has a substantial developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition, may be considered to have a developmental disability without meeting 3 or more of the criteria (listed above) ... if the individual, without services and supports, has a high probability of meeting those criteria later in life.



From the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 2000 Reauthorization, Public Law 106-402, S. 1809-7(8).

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A critical mass of Alabama's housing community came together on January 30 to launch a major new initiative for the state.

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Affordable Care Act overview presented to Council

The presentation was entitled "Making health care reform work for Alabama: What the Affordable Care Act means for a high-poverty state."



ACDD Mission Statement

To promote and support independence, advocacy, productivity and inclusion for Alabamians with developmental disabilities.

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DISCLAIMER: All direct quotations and other information represented through interviews in this magazine are the opinions of the speakers, and do not necessarily represent the position of the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities or the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Letter *from the* Governor



STATE OF ALABAMA

Greetings

I was pleased last month to have my office represented by Jim Byard, of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA), and Graham Sisson, of the Governor's Office on Disability, at the public launch of ALHousingSearch.org. I often stress the importance of public and private sectors working together for the greater good of all, and this initiative is another excellent example of how that can happen.

No matter where we are in life, we all need a place to live. For many of our most vulnerable citizens, safe, affordable housing is a major challenge. This new project establishes a free, centralized, continually updated housing listing and locator service for the state of Alabama serving both landlords and tenants. It is good for the people who use it to find a house, and good for the individuals, businesses or housing authorities that use it to rent or lease available housing.

As a wheelchair user all of his adult life, Graham gave a personal insight into the difficulty of finding housing that can accommodate people with disabilities. Jim noted that having a fast and easy way to locate housing information and related resources not only benefits renters, it is also a valuable asset for property owners and a vital tool for strengthening the economic health of our communities.

Jim also pointed out all of the different individuals and groups that came together to launch this important project that will help people from all walks of life. Sometimes it seems that we only hear about the things that divide us. But in Jim's words: "I think safe and affordable housing is one thing we can all agree on." I certainly agree with Jim on that point!

I want to thank the Council and the many people and groups that worked hard to make this housing resource a reality. More importantly, I want to encourage us to continue working together for the greater good of our people and for the great state of Alabama.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Bentley".



STATE OF ALABAMA

from the Council Chair



Dave Martin, Council Chair

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

I have long been a fan of the work being done by Triumph Services in Birmingham. Clearly the people who work at Triumph have their hearts in the right place, but it's more than that. Here is what Triumph's founding director, Brooke Stephens, has to say about their work:

"As I have said many times, this is really just a business model – we saw a need and are working to fill that need. We want our clients to be successful in their home life, in their work, and in their relationships. But you learn to live on your own by actually living on your own, you learn to be social by immersing yourself in social activities. We believe Triumph Services provides a great model for doing these things. And I think the success our clients have experienced speaks for itself."

People with disabilities are not all just alike, any more than all students are all alike, or all dentists are all alike. People with disabilities are individuals who live and learn and think and react to experience in their own unique manner. So naturally, when a group or agency is working with a client who has a disability, there is not just one, monolithic manner of addressing that person's needs. Triumph Services really "gets" this.

Triumph strives first to get to know a person. They don't just see someone and try to get them a job bagging groceries or washing cars. They look for a person's natural strengths, and as they get to know the person better they also get to know their deficits. They work on these together. And they make the person with the disability do the work: "We are not going to work harder than they are," said Clinical Services director Leigh Belcher. "We can't do the work for them. Another one of our favorite sayings goes like this: 'You drive the bus, we are just the tour guides.' And that's the way it has to be."

A theme of this magazine, and a driving principle of the work of the Council, is to emphasize ability rather than disability. All of our people have ability. It's important to see that. But we also all have our deficits and areas where we need to improve. So working on them together seems to me a very good way to make progress, and is just what the people are doing at Triumph Services.

Brooke Stephens is probably being modest when she says "this is really just a business model," but as the resource pool becomes ever more strained in these difficult economic times, there's nothing wrong with combining a good "business model" with a caring, compassionate, creative approach to helping our people be the best they can be.

A Letter

from the **Executive Director**



Elmyra Jones, Executive Director

ALABAMA COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

As Executive Director of the Council, my most important duty is to support our Council members. In order “to promote and support independence, advocacy, productivity and inclusion for Alabamians with developmental disabilities,” we schedule quarterly meetings to do our business in an open, public forum and decide how to spend our allotted funds to promote this important mission. Our areas of emphasis are articulated in our state plan, and we fund grant proposals that address those areas.

For this to happen in an orderly and effective manner, Council members work hard on many fronts. They bring a wide variety of life experiences to our Council. They bring real-world understanding of people with developmental disabilities and a passionate spirit to our work as a Council. It is my distinct privilege to watch these leaders grow and evolve and share their passion with their fellow Council members and with the larger population of our state.

One of our most outstanding and hard-working Council members, Johnna Breland, has written a short tribute in this issue to her late friend and fellow Council member Beverly Gardner. Beverly recently left us, her husband, and her large family of 16 children with her sudden and unexpected death. Needless to say her passing has left pain in a lot of hearts. Although Beverly was just one of 36 Council members, it is moments like this that help me to understand what strong, diverse and caring leadership we have on the Council, and how important it is to bring passion and experience to help guide the Council's work.

Everyone who knew Beverly knew that she had a passion for children. But in the midst of such serious work Beverly was a fun and delightful person who always had a smile on her face. We want to thank Johnna for her tribute to Beverly in this issue, and we remember all the Council members who have given so much of themselves to our work.

In his recent remarks to the Council, Vice-chair Stef Eisen invoked all those who volunteer to serve to do so with all their hearts, and to work hard to make this Council as strong and effective as it can be. He asked that we do more than just “go with the flow,” and that we keep its mission in mind and do diligent work on its behalf. I am proud of our hard-working Council members, and am grateful for the way they enrich my life and the lives of countless Alabamians.

Beverly, we will miss you.

Live, work and play—

Brooke Stephens,
Triumph Services
focus on the individual



❧

"The need seemed obvious, but not the solution," she said. "We might see a social network here, with a therapist there, but no one place that really delivered a holistic approach to community life for adults with developmental disabilities."

Stephens imagined a place where an entire team could work together to help adults reach their goals by having access to caring and committed therapists, life coaches, job coaches, and mentors, all under a single umbrella. From this vision, Triumph Services was born.

❧

Founded just five years ago to carry over services to 16 adults when UAB's Lifelong Coordination Clinic shut down, Triumph Services in Birmingham has thrived, having served almost 200 individuals with developmental disabilities since that inauspicious start.

"In 2007 we saw an urgent need to serve adults with developmental disabilities, especially those on the autism spectrum," Stephens said. "The individuals we support do not qualify for Medicaid funded programs offered through larger organizations. We are uniquely situated to help individuals develop



“We get to know each person who approaches Triumph,” Stephens said. “The individual drives everything here. We ask the person: ‘Where are you now? Where do you want to be?’ Our goal is always to meet people exactly where they are. And it is often easier for us to see that than it is for the family.”

holistically. We work to support people to live, work and play in their community.”

“We want individuals to be integrated in all areas of the community,” Stephens said. “We want to see folks in the workplace, sure, but also at jazz concerts, in church, at a piano lesson, or out at one of our weekly social functions. We not only want to impact the individuals, but we want to impact the community as well. When we say a holistic approach, we mean it.”

working with the Coordination Clinic. All of this – plus having a family member on the Autism spectrum – prepared Stephens for her present role as leader of a unique organization.

After earning her Psychology degree from Auburn, Stephens went to work at the Sparks Clinic, later working as a case manager while also working towards a Masters in Counseling at UAB. She gained extensive experience at Glenwood before

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“This is really just a common sense model – we saw a need and are working to meet that need. We want individuals to be successful in their home lives, in their work lives, and in their relationships. But you learn to live on your own by actually living on your own; you learn to be social by immersing yourself in social activities. We believe Triumph Services provides a great model for doing these things. And I think the success individuals are experiencing speaks for itself.”

Although fewer than one out of ten adults with autism live independently

or have a job, Triumph has an 80 percent job placement rate, while also boasting a 95 percent job retention rate.

A holistic approach to services

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As a new business model, Triumph pays for its services in a variety of ways. About half of the organization’s income derives from fees for its services. The other half comes from contract services with agencies such as ADRS.

“And a heck of a lot of fundraising!” Stephens adds.

Chief among these is Triumph’s annual Open House and Art Show “Friend-raiser” and the Taste of Triumph event, with its great food, entertainment, and outstanding live auction that this year featured a week at a private home in Costa Rica, a private wine

party for 20 at GianMarco's, and several other high-end treats.

Triumph does much more than employment services, though it prides itself on its high success rate and variety of occupational opportunities.

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Looking to the future

When starting Triumph in 2007, Stephens assumed she would be serving the 16 people from the Lifelong Coordination Clinic. But through friends, family, and word of mouth, the organization continues to grow.

"Just this week, for example, we met with two families who heard about Triumph from individuals they had spoken with in the community. In addition, as students graduate from high school, we anticipate that the need for adult services will continue to grow. In addition to local folks, families come to us from across Alabama and even other parts of the country. For example, we work with a young woman who is doing very well, and her family lives in Maine while she has her own apartment here on the Southside."

"Currently, we are at a place where we want to stay ahead of our growth, but with that said, we have a strong plan for expansion in 2014," Stephens said. "Is this my passion? Yes, of course it is. But I am an administrator, and this is a business model. What we do is super cost-effective and it works. Compared to a facility, in terms of cost, it's not even close."

While Stephens is the founder and the "face" of Triumph Services, she gives all the credit to her dedicated staff of life coaches, therapists and employment specialists.

"Not only are they brilliant, they also love their jobs. If you love the people you work with, you will do well. I'm very excited about where we are going."

2013 Triumph Services Community Partners

The following businesses and organizations presently employ or have recently employed Triumph Services clients.

RETAIL

Books-A-Million
Burlington Coat Factory
Charming Charlie's
Dollar Tree
Leaf & Petal
Little Hardware
Lovelady Thrift Store
Old Navy
Old Time Pottery
Party City
Racing USA
Target
TJ Maxx
Wal-Mart

GROCERY

Food Giant
Fresh Market
Piggly Wiggly
Publix
V. Richard's
Western Supermarket

FOOD

Café Iz
Chick-fil-A
Cracker Barrel
Edgewood Catering
GianMarco's
Griddle House
Gus's Hot Dogs
Jim 'N Nick's BBQ
McAlister's Deli
Mellow Mushroom
Papa John's
Sodexo
Starbuck's
Steel City Pops
Taco Bell
The Garage
Tracy's Cafeteria

ENTERTAINMENT

Bent Brook Golf Course
Carmike Movie Theater
Rave Movie Theater
Workplay

ANIMAL CARE

Greater Birmingham Humane Society
Greensprings Animal Clinic
Helena Veterinary Clinic

EDUCATION

Creative Montessori School
South Highland Adult Daycare
South Highland Child Development
University of Alabama at Birmingham

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Alabama Justice Ministries
Believer's Temple Church
The Birmingham Zoo
Dawson Memorial Baptist Church
Emmet O' Neal Library
Firehouse Shelter
Five Points Library
Glenwood, Inc.
Goodwill Industries
Hoover Public Library
Jewish Community Center
McWane Center
North Shelby County Library
Southside Baptist Church
Trussville Public Library
YMCA

HOSPITALITY

Aloft Hotel
Embassy Suites

PROFESSIONAL

Cart-o-Craft Maps
Collateral Services
Compass Bank
CR England Refrigeration
New South Federal Bank
Protective Life Insurance
Qualitest Pharmaceuticals
Sungard
V.W. Supply Company
Visual Solutions

MAINTENANCE

Hand Landscaping
Mister Car Wash
TruGreen Lawn Care

Director of Clinical Services—

Leigh Belcher

works to “engage each individual.”



As the Director of Clinical Services at Triumph Services in Birmingham, Leigh Belcher brings 15 years of experience in the counseling and mental

health fields to her work. And she also brings a lot of passion.

“I received my Masters of Counseling in 1999

at Georgia State and had the good fortune to start my career at Glenwood here in Birmingham,” Belcher said. “My wide variety

of experiences at Glenwood and in private practice led me to the cognitive behavioral approach that we use here at Triumph Services. It all starts with really getting to know the individuals, listening, assessing their skills and needs, and developing goals to meet those needs.”

Belcher said a driving philosophy in her work is to meet people exactly where they are.

“If the individual is not motivated or really working to partner with us, it might not work out. Fortunately, most of the participants are working hard to accomplish their

“My wide variety of experiences at Glenwood and in private practice led me to the cognitive behavioral approach that we use here at Triumph Services.”

clearly-established goals of becoming part of the workplace and part of the community.”

“We have several sayings around Triumph that we live by,” Belcher continued. “One, I believe, has been key to an individual’s success: ‘You drive the bus, we are just the tour guides.’ This philosophy establishes from the beginning that the participant is in control of his or her services.”

In addition to an 80 percent success rate at placing clients in jobs – and in keeping those jobs – Triumph works to help individuals integrate into the larger community.

A night on the town

“The average age of an individual receiving services is 26 years old, though we do work with several individuals who are over the age of 50,” Belcher said. “We are a unique, out-of-the-box organization that has fun as we work hard toward employment and community integration. In addition to serious therapy and social skills development in-house, we put those lessons to work through our numerous social events at night. We go to concerts, go bowling, attend ball games, visit museums, symphonies, you name it. I guess everyone’s favorite activity is going out to eat.”

“Through all of our programs, especially the social program, we engage each person, sometimes in a small

group with only a couple of individuals. Other times we organize larger social activities so that folks learn how to interact in small group and large group settings. The outcome is that people have developed their own friendships and social networks.”

On a recent night when editors from the *ACDD Advocate* were in town, a group of about two dozen Triumph participants met for supper at a popular Southside Birmingham eatery, Jim & Nick’s Barbecue. In some ways it was a remarkable evening, in that most of the people there that night had been diagnosed with a developmental disability. In other ways it was like any other Friday night where a group of young adults come together: some enjoyed a beer or two before dinner, some talked about upcoming ball games, some made a spontaneous plan to go to a movie later that night. Most people lived in the neighborhood and walked to the restaurant, though some individuals took cabs or caught a ride. One young man knew virtually every server and cook in the restaurant and enjoyed catching up with these friends.

And everyone talked about their jobs. These were competitive jobs – teaching assistants at the nearby Montessori School, a reference worker at the local library, an usher at the movie theater, a veterinarian’s assistant, and retail, food service, and other community

work. So in one way the social event was remarkable – in another way it was just a fun Friday night among friends. Two or three Triumph staffers were along, though it was hard to tell who was a participant and who was not. When asked about Triumph, the participants were unanimous in their praise, and they spoke with a common theme: “They treat us like who we are — adults.”

“That’s always our aim,” Belcher concluded. “We help people find their strengths, and we work together to address their needs. We have worked hard to gain nearly 90 community partners in our employment program. The participants have worked hard to succeed at those jobs, and to help their employers achieve success in the marketplace.”

Since many individuals have moved into their own apartments, staff members make in-home visits to reinforce those skills necessary to live successfully in the community, but it still comes down to the individual.

“This is their life, and we are privileged to be part of it,” Belcher said. “It is amazing to see the progress a person makes when they have control over their life and they have people who believe in them.”

For more information on Triumph Services, visit the organization’s website at www.triumphservices.org



A night on the town



'Murderball' star inspires conference with life story—

MURDERBALL

BOB LUJANO

delivers keynote at Alatec 2012

persons to access education, employment, housing, transportation, health care and leisure/recreation in the community of choice.

The conference kicked off with a welcome from Dr. E. Davis Martin, Head of Auburn University's Department of Special Ed and Rehabilitation. He noted that the conference had grown in each of its three years and remarked on the high quality of technology being displayed by the conference's many vendors and sponsors (see attached list). Martin also noted the support of Auburn's Office of Professional and Continuing Education.

"Assistive Technology is the great equalizer toward independent living for people with disabilities," Martin noted. "We've made tremendous progress, but our challenge now is to help society see this and continue to move into the mainstream of all aspects of American life. AT opens up for us many arenas of life and helps us capture the American Dream."

Martin went on to note that few Americans had made a bigger impact of combining an active life with assistive technology than has Bob Lujano. Many in the large audience recognized the conference's keynote speaker as one of the hard-charging Quad Rugby players who were profiled in the critically-acclaimed documentary "Murderball," which chronicled Team USA's quest for gold at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece.

The 2012 Alabama Assistive Technology Expo and Conference – better known as Alatec – held its third annual event at Auburn University's Student Center on October 22nd and 23rd. The conference was organized by Scott Renner, Coordinator of Assistive Technology at Auburn University's Center for Disability Research and Service. The conference allowed attendees to see first-hand the latest in assistive technologies, practices and services for persons with disabilities that will increase the ability of such



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Dr. E. Davis Martin, Head of Auburn University’s Department of Special Ed and Rehabilitation.

When Lujano was just nine years old, living the life of an athletically-gifted and outdoors-loving Kansas farm boy, he lost both of his legs and most of both arms after he contracted a rare, deadly form of meningitis. Doctors gave him a few hours to live.

“But as you can see I’m still here!” Lujano said with a laugh. “Growing up all I really loved was baseball. I prayed to be like Pete Rose. I loved the way he hustled like there was no tomorrow. But God knows what is best for each of us. Even when I woke up with no arms

just wanted to be outside and wanted to play. My parents just let me be me.”

In a Chicago rehab facility, Lujano tried lower limb prosthetics but didn’t like them. He used prosthetic arms to much greater effect and continued to use them as he grew up, though now he says he uses them mostly to drive his specially-equipped automobile.

Pushed by his physical therapists, Lujano wasn’t satisfied to sit on the side and play chess and checkers while the other kids played games in PE at his public school, so he came up with ideas about how he could continue to compete in the sports he loved.

“In basketball for example, I could dominate. I was only 5’5”, but when I raised up my crutch I was an 8’5” shot-blocking machine!”

Moving constantly in his wheelchair throughout his presentation, Lujano gave countless examples of how he adapted into life as a person and a player and a friend, and not just as someone with a disability.

After graduating from high school in 1988, Lujano went to the University of Texas at Arlington. There he discovered adaptive sports, in particular wheelchair basketball. Later, he went on to pursue a graduate degree in sports management at the University of Tennessee. When he started working on the U.S. Paralympic organizing committee during the 1996 games in Atlanta, Lujano caught a glimpse of what would become his calling -- Quad Rugby.

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or legs I knew I had a purpose. Faith and family is what helped me through the 20 operations and rehabilitations I had to undergo.”

Lujano said the toughest part for him was the mental aspect of facing down a disability. He said his father was a huge help in dealing with this issue.

“He was a real help to me,” Lujano said. “He wasn’t embarrassed and so I knew I shouldn’t be. In some ways things didn’t change after the amputations. I still

"I had heard about rugby and was soon caught up in the hard-drinking, hard-playing rugby lifestyle," he said. "It was great being a part of that Buckhead scene, but it was more about the lifestyle than the rugby and in the long run that wasn't who I was. But I have some great memories from those sports bars!"

Although Lujano had played wheelchair basketball for five years, he was at best a utility man on a good squad. But rugby was different. Here he could emulate his sports idol Pete Rose and play with abandon. He became an elite player.

"In 1988 I got a job at Lakeshore in Birmingham and was introduced to real discipline," he said. "This was new, the serious commitment they had to the sport and the competition. Our team, the Lakeshore Demolition, won championships every year from 1998 until 2003. I can tell you we were in great shape."

His list of team championships goes on and on. In his ten years of playing Quad Rugby, Lujano has won five U.S. Quad Rugby National Championships with the Lakeshore Demolition and has won three medals playing rugby for the U.S. Paralympic team: one gold medal (1999 World Wheelchair Games in Christchurch, New Zealand); one silver medal (Rugby World Championships in Gothenburg, Sweden) and one bronze medal (2004 Paralympic Games of Athens, Greece).

"This sport has allowed me to travel all over the world and meet many great people," he said. "Our commitment to excellence was always pure. We signed a Code of Conduct to represent Team USA. We focused on good nutrition, and there was no question of anyone using performance-enhancing drugs. I made the commitment and it changed my life. And although I am no longer competing at that level I am still dedicated to quality in all that I do."

Lujano shared how the team's success drew the attention of New York filmmakers who followed Team USA for three years and had 300 hours of footage that was ultimately cut down to seven minutes of intense screen time, and how the documentary went on to win the first prize at the Sundance Film Festival and receive an Academy Award nomination.



"It was my time to be Brad Pitt!" he said with a laugh. "But the movie portrayed me as who I really am: a guy who is dedicated to hard work, his church, and his community. The bottom line here is that we all need to connect, no matter what has happened to us in our lives."

"My purpose is to serve God's purpose. For me that means working with people with disabilities, and

"My purpose is to serve God's purpose. For me that means working with people with disabilities, and helping both them and myself find ways to use all of our abilities. My goal, I hope, is the same as your goal: to have as independent a life as possible and to focus on my abilities."

helping both them and myself find ways to use *all* of our abilities. My goal, I hope, is the same as your goal: to have as independent a life as possible and to focus on my abilities."



With support from ACDD grant—

Vogtle, UAB

seek nutritional and physical interventions for youth with Down syndrome

Dr. Laura Vogtle, a Professor of Occupational Therapy at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), has recently been awarded a grant by the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities

— particularly obesity — in young people with Down syndrome. Vogtle will work with Sue Tolle and Parent Advocates Down Syndrome Alabama (PADS) for the duration of the grant.

“Although I grew up just north of Boston as one of five children, my mother was from the South so I somehow ended up in college at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond,” Vogtle

with developmental disabilities as part of a nine-month field internship I knew this is what I wanted to do. My first post-graduate job was at Children’s Hospital in Washington, D.C., where I was exposed to the real-life problems that many of these children face in addition to their disabilities, including child abuse. From there I moved on to the Kluge Children’s Rehabilitation Center at the University of Virginia where I spent the next 23 years in a very stimulating, forward-thinking, progressive pediatric research center.”

It was in Charlottesville that Vogtle met her husband, who is a social worker and originally from Birmingham. After earning her Masters and Ph.D in

“Occupational Therapy was an undergraduate degree option at VCU and after spending time with children with developmental disabilities as part of a nine-month field internship I knew this is what I wanted to do.”

(ACDD) to focus on physical activity and proper nutrition interventions for the prevention of secondary conditions

said. “Occupational Therapy was an undergraduate degree option at VCU and after spending time with children

Educational Psychology, with a major in Program Evaluation, Vogtle was recruited in 1995 to UAB as part of the Occupational Therapy faculty, and she has been here ever since.

OT covers a wide range of services

"I always knew I wanted to work with children, and I fell in love with Birmingham and UAB, so it was a perfect fit," Vogtle said. "Although my main focus in this grant is on young people, it is important to note that Occupational Therapy provides rehabilitation services — skills of daily living — across the lifespan. Our goal in OT is to help our clients become as independent as they can be. This would mean everything from meal preparation and self-care, all the way to job skills, whether that means a sheltered environment or competitive employment or working in supported employment. We just want to do all we can to help people achieve their life's goals."

Vogtle emphasizes this sort of work is extremely broad-based. OT practices might involve assistive technology, adaptive environmental modifications (such as finding ways to remove distractions for people with ADD), or any combination of these things. Physical Therapy focuses more on exercise rehabilitation; OT generally encompasses a wider range of achieving goals that people with injuries or disabilities are trying to reach, whatever that may involve.

"The first thing an Occupational Therapist must do is listen to the client," Vogtle said. "Since we are typically paid by insurance companies our goal must be to work toward a specific function. That might mean learning how to use a transportation system, for example. But the goal is always to help our clients achieve their full potential."

Research funding led to disabilities focus

When Vogtle arrived at UAB, the OT profession was transitioning from an undergraduate program to a Mas-



ters-based program. Vogtle was tapped to direct UAB's OT master's program where she taught courses for therapies across the lifespan. She was soon directing the post-professional cohort at UAB. In addition to her administrative roles, Vogtle was able to attract funding from the Centers for Disease Control to study outcomes, quality of life issues in elderly persons with epilepsy, and transportation problems for persons with epilepsy, and from private industry to study outcomes following BOTOX injections.

"This exposure to disabilities led me to work with Dr. Gary Edwards at UCP of Greater Birmingham to work with adults with developmental disabilities. In fact, Dr. Edwards is the person who sent me the RFP from the DD Council. For a long time I have

been interested in exercise interventions, and here at UAB we also have very strong programs in nutrition, obesity and diabetes. Dr. Jim Rimmer, Endowed Chair in Health Promotion and Rehabilitation Sciences and Director of the UAB/Lakeshore Research collaborative, developed and directs the National Center on Health, Physical

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Activity, and Disability (www.nchpad.org), so as I thought about this I came up with the idea of trying to put similar goals together but with a focus not on

Cerebral Palsy, but on Down syndrome instead.”

Vogtle contacted Sue Tolle, Executive Director of PADS, who was excited at the opportunities the grant work might offer because fitness and nutrition are major topics addressed at the Adult Down Syndrome Clinic at UAB which PADS sponsors.

“I knew about exercise interventions, and I also knew that Alabama had one of the highest obesity rates in the country,” Vogtle said. “I also knew that among diagnosed disabilities, people with Down syndrome have the highest rates of obesity. Knowing that we would want to address children’s behavior – especially in terms of nutri-

“We hope when the 16 weeks is up that the young people in the program will get to where they like physical activity, whether that means getting the mail or walking the dog or taking the laundry upstairs. Dr. Rimmer has an assessment tool for physical fitness programs and facilities that Dr. Barstow, another occupational therapy faculty member, will modify for people with cognitive disabilities to help parents have choices when considering such programs. Weight, of course, is an outcome we can measure, but we will also look at body mass index (BMI) and other health indicators.”

Because of the many available resources at UAB, the grant will first target the Birmingham area but Vogtle hopes to replicate the work in both Gadsden and Cullman.

“We want to develop programmatic and practical information from this grant,” Vogtle said. “These are busy, hardworking parents who will be involved with us, so it is in many ways a family intervention. PADS is all about families already, so they will be a huge help to us. We will work with Susan Tolle and the PADS website to generate interest and share our results. While all of this is going on we will also have a support group for parents. In the long run the family may need to change for the child to change. Parents naturally feel protective of their child with Down syndrome and we want to help them share their successes and address the challenges they meet with ways they can help their child.”

While Vogtle points out many other resources available at UAB, she emphasizes that the support from the Council grant is what makes it all possible.

“Our goal in this program, through this grant, is to help families,” she said. “We know they will do anything they can to make life better for their child, and we know that food selectivity,

especially food texture, is a real issue. And unfortunately, sometimes satisfying their child through preferred-food repetition leads to behavioral issues when change is attempted. We aim to help them work on healthier habits to make a better life for their child, who will soon grow into an adult. Sue Tolle of PADS always tells me that ‘Our parents might be frustrated and tired but they are motivated.’ We know this won’t be easy. But with the financial support of the Council, we hope to make life better and healthier and happier for all involved.”

The weekly program will involve both nutritional and physical activity, and will include ideas from other related programs Vogtle has researched around the country since writing the DD Council grant.

tion and exercise – it just seemed that a lot of our local resources and sources of expertise came together in a very good way that led us to be able to make a good proposal for the grant from the DD Council.”

“The plan for implementing the grant will begin with a series of focus groups with families. Working with an expert in the School of Health Professions, Dr. Qu, we will ask families how they get their children to eat vegetables, or exercise, or what challenges they meet when trying to do these things. We will then work with a dietetic intern and occupational therapy students, develop the program, then meet weekly for 16 weeks with adolescents with Down syndrome and focus on ways to eat well and be physically active.”

The weekly program will involve both nutritional and physical activity, and will include ideas from other related programs Vogtle has researched around the country since writing the DD Council grant.

“Our goal in this program, though this grant, is to help families,” she said. “We know they will do anything they can to make life better for their child, and we know that food selectivity, especially food texture, is a real issue. And unfortunately, sometimes satisfying their child through preferred-food repetition leads to behavioral issues when change is attempted. We aim to help them work on healthier habits to make a better life for their child, who will soon grow into an adult. Sue Tolle of PADS always tells me that ‘Our parents might be frustrated and tired but they are motivated.’ We know this won’t be easy. But with the financial support of the Council, we hope to make life better and healthier and happier for all involved.”

'Just what we were looking for'

By Sue Tolle
Executive Director, Parent Advocates
Down Syndrome



Teens and self advocates with Down syndrome recently attended a conference hosted by Parent Advocates Down Syndrome with a theme of Making Healthy Food Choices and Finding Out Fitness is Fun. Everyone had a great time but the lingering question was "What can we do next?" to continue encouraging and further equip individuals with Down syndrome and their families to incorporate healthy eating habits and exercise into their daily lives.

So when Laura Vogtle contacted us about a proposal to apply for an Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities (ACDD) grant that would provide focus groups for parents and caretakers followed by activity groups for teens and adults with Down syndrome, we knew this was the answer we had been looking for. We expect this endeavor to have far-reaching influence and a long lasting impact upon the Down syndrome community. We are excited to be working with Laura, UAB, and the ACDD, and we look forward to witnessing the results!



I always treasure the little "gems" of learning that I'm able to gather every time I'm with the wonderfully creative and wise parents who live with an extra chromosome. Because of that, I try to help by sharing our personal experiences whenever possible. The focus group with Dr. Vogtle was another one of those experiences. The session didn't take long because we maintained focus! But most of all, I walked away with new ideas and convictions for supporting our daughter as she seeks a healthy and independent lifestyle. Afterwards, we informally continued our friendships over lunch. Because it was truly an enjoyable experience for me, I encourage others to share (and gather) ideas related to this very important topic for our children.

Kathy Olive (Beth's mom)

'It brought all sides together'

ALHousingSearch.org launch at Montgomery City Hall a major success



Dan Kessler, Executive Director of Disability Rights and Resources

In spite of the threat of rain, wind and winter tornadoes, a broad base of partners that made up the critical mass of Alabama's housing community came together on January 30 to launch a major new initiative for the state. Alabama's press, television and radio media were also there to cover the event, thanks in large part to the

efforts of Jeff Shackelford from the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Larry Childers from ADECA.

As is explained in a related story in this issue, ALHousingSearch.org is a free, centralized, continually updated housing listing and locator service for the state of Alabama. The setting for

the launch was the beautiful and historic Montgomery City Hall on North Perry Street, glowing in the splendor of its recent renovation. A warm welcome by Steve Jones from Mayor Todd Strange's of-



Steve Jones from Mayor Todd Strange's office

fice made everyone feel even more at home.

The program kicked off as Master of Ceremonies Dan Kessler, Executive Director of Disability Rights and Resources, located in Birmingham, recognized the many partners who are working on

The program kicked off as Master of Ceremonies Dan Kessler, Executive Director of Disability Rights and Resources, located in Birmingham, recognized the many partners who are working on this project. Although Disability Rights and Resources (DDR) is managing the project, it took the help of many other groups to make the long-needed housing initiative a reality.

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"First, let me recognize the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities," Kessler said. "If it weren't for the Council we would not be meeting here today. Back in 2011 the Council issued a request for proposal to develop a directory of rental housing for people with disabilities. Jennifer Dewberry, one of our Americorp VISTA volunteers working with the Montgomery Center for Independent Living, attended an orientation meeting at the Council.



State Rep. Patricia Todd

She strongly encouraged us to apply for funding, which we did. The Council awarded us the grant. Thanks so much to Myra Jones and the Council for your support."

Kessler acknowledged other groups that have long been part of an effort to promote affordable housing options for the citizens of Alabama, including the Low Income Housing Coalition of Alabama, Collaborative Solutions, the Montgomery Center for Independent Living, and SocialServe.com.

"When we applied to the Council for funding we asked Collaborative Solutions for a letter of support, which they provided," Kessler noted. "At the same time, we provided Collaborative Solutions with a letter of support for their own proposal. I imagine it's unusual for organizations to provide letters of support for their competition. When we were awarded funding we knew that we wanted Collaborative Solutions involved in this project, given their expertise, their wide network in the housing community, and their reputation for quality. They certainly have brought all of that to this project, and we appreciate them very much."



Jim Byard, Jr., Director, (ADECA)

Kessler noted that at the outset of this project, his group researched several options, based on specific criteria set forth by DDR :

1. The housing directory had to address the housing needs of people with disabilities, including accessibility requirements, such as accessible paths of travel to and within the units, accessible bathrooms, and other accessibility features. We also knew that our housing directory should be open to the entire universe of rental housing, not just "accessible" housing. Housing needs in the disability community vary; we wanted our directory to capture that diversity of needs.
2. The housing directory had to be dynamic. We didn't want a static directory. We wanted a directory that was up-to-date, so that when you contacted landlords you had confidence that they had apartments available.
3. We wanted to have an on-line presence.
4. Our on-line housing directory had to be 508 compliant. For example, screen reader users must be able to navigate the site independently.



Associate Commissioner for Developmental Disabilities from the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Courtney Tarver

“It is important for people with disabilities to be in the mainstream,” Tarver stated. “And nothing is more important, more mainstream, than a safe, secure and affordable place to live. This project makes good sense and is a great investment for our state and our people.”

5. We wanted users to be able to call a toll free number in order to get information about housing options. Many of those we serve—people with disabilities, homeless people, poor people, residents of some rural areas—may not have ready access to the internet. We didn’t want the digital divide to prevent people from accessing the housing directory.

6. The service had to be free of charge to those searching for rental housing and for landlords listing their units. “Our research led us to SocialServe.com, based in Charlotte, NC.

SocialServe.com met all of our criteria, and much more, as you will learn. SocialServe.com is in 34 states.”

“ALHousingSearch.org addresses the housing needs of diverse populations, including people with disabilities, victims of natural disasters, people who are homeless, people transitioning from institutions to the community, people in urban and rural areas, people who are re-locating from other states, and anyone seeking rental housing or listing rental housing in the state.”

Following Kessler’s introduction, an impressive lineup of housing advocates spoke about the importance of the new initiative. Coming from several state agencies and both sides of the political aisle, it was a real example of collabora-

tion for a common cause.

Speaking first was Associate Commissioner for Developmental Disabilities from the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Courtney Tarver.

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disabilities to be in the mainstream,” Tarver stated. “And nothing is more important, more mainstream, than a safe, secure and affordable place to live. This project makes good sense and is a great investment for our state and our people.”

State Rep. Patricia Todd followed Tarver. Todd has long been known for her advocacy for the poor and down-trodden of our state, and she began

by referencing Abraham Maslow’s well-known hierarchy of needs. Maslow observed that every person is capable of and has the desire to move up the hierarchy of needs toward belongingness and a level of self-actualization. But in the cycle of poverty all too many people are unable to address their fundamental biological needs, especially shelter.

“We know that people should be spending about 30 percent of their income on housing,” she said, “but in our state and in other states, it is too often 50 percent of income or more. And for hard-working families making minimum wage, the housing that takes



Nina Miller, Chief Operations Officer of SocialServe.com

most of their money is still sub-standard, and that’s a polite word for it. ALHousingSearch.org gives us a chance to address that deficit. Alabama has long needed a centralized database of available affordable housing, and



"I have had to rip out way more bathroom doors and frames than I care to remember," he said. "Things are generally moving in the right direction, but this initiative will make it much easier for both tenants and landlords to address the issue of accommodations for people with disabilities."

Graham Sisson, Director of the Governor's Office on Disability

ALHousingSearch.org will give us the tools we need to find available housing throughout the state."

"I feel like I spend a lot of time talking about things that people do not want to hear, so it's a great thing today to be able to stand before you and talk about something so positive! Thanks to everyone who has worked so hard to make this happen."

Nina Miller, Chief Operations Officer of Socialserve.com then took the floor to explain how the website works and why it is so good for so many people. She also provided a brief demonstration of the web site and provided a more extensive demonstration once the program had concluded. She also emphasized that her organization's call centers were often manned by people with disabilities as well as people who were formerly homeless.

"They understand what people are really going through, and we are proud to have them with us and earning a living wage."

Graham Sisson addressed the group on behalf of Gov. Robert Bentley. As the Director of the Governor's Office on Disability, and as a wheelchair user all of his adult life, Sisson gave a personal insight into the difficulty of finding housing that can accommodate people

with disabilities.

"I have had to rip out way more bathroom doors and frames than I care to remember," he said. "Things are generally moving in the right direction, but this initiative will make it much easier for both tenants and landlords to address the issue of accommodations for people with disabilities."

Red Cross District Emergency Services Officer Grover Henry noted the disaster response features of the web site and database, saying these features would be an asset for the Red Cross. He also encouraged everyone in attendance to "make a disaster plan!"

The final speaker of the day was Jim Byard, Jr., the Director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). "I am glad to be here today and feel that ALHousingSearch.org will be especially helpful to prospective renters whose work and family demands leave them limited time to invest in a search for housing," Byard said. "This fast and easy way to locate housing information and related resources not only benefits renters, it also will be a valuable asset for property owners and a vital tool for strengthening the economic health of our communities."

Byard also addressed the collabo-

rative nature of the initiative and the launch itself.

"I can tell you that I have never been on a stage or at a meeting or a hearing with Patricia Todd when I did not learn something," he remarked. "Even though she and Gov. Bentley come from different political perspectives on many issues, I think safe and affordable housing is one thing we can all agree on. When I look at Rep. Todd and Graham Sisson, two words come to mind: tenacious and passionate. And for all of you here, people who care so much about issues like this, I want to remind you of something I heard a pastor say at a recent prayer breakfast I attended."



Red Cross District Emergency Services Officer Grover Henry

Byard then removed a coin with the letter B on one side and the letter D on the other.

"Whatever you do, BE present in the moment. It's so easy to tweet and check emails and do all the things that distract us. If that's all you do, you won't know what you might miss. So be present in the moment. Also, DO for one like you would do for all. What we are doing here is something that will benefit all. The more we can work together for the common good as we are doing with projects like this, the better off our state will be."

ACDD Executive Director Myra Jones concluded the eventful day by thanking all in attendance and reminding the gathered crowd that "housing is for everyone."

Project funded by ACDD—

ALHousingSearch.org

— free listing and locator service for Alabama landlords and renters



Searching and listing

ALHousingSearch.org offers landlords a free way to advertise properties while helping renters more easily find units to fit specific needs. Listings include photos and map links and information about rent, deposits, accessibility features and neighborhood amenities such as parks, schools and shopping. Printer-friendly search results can be sorted by preferences such as location and date available.

A median income calculator and rent-affordability tools help renters locate safe, decent properties that

they can afford. Search results can be displayed on a map, and a proximity search helps locate properties within a selected distance from desired locations such as work, school or a family member's house.

Renters search anonymously, making the search process faster and more accessible. Preserving tenant anonymity in the early stages of the housing

ALHousingSearch.org is a centralized, continually updated housing listing and locator service for the state of Alabama. The service – available online and via toll-free call center, phone, fax, mail and email – is funded by The Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities, and powered by the national nonprofit Socialserve.com.

Website and call center services are available in English and Spanish. The

landlord/tenant bilingual call center number is 877-428-8844. The call center is open 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. CST, Monday through Friday. The website's accessibility features and call center make this service easy to use and available to everyone. Searching and listing on the service is 100% free for all users. A link to the site is also available at the Council's recently-updated website -- www.acdd.org.

The service – available online and via toll-free call center, phone, fax, mail and email – is funded by The Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities, and powered by the national nonprofit Socialserve.com.



search is another step to preventing Fair Housing violations.

Landlords complete a free registration to list on ALHousingSearch.org so they can be contacted if necessary to make sure listings are up to date. A vetted system of email and call center touch-points keeps listings in the system current. Current housing information is a vital aspect of ALHousingSearch.org; it means less wasted time for tenants and caseworkers, a clearer picture of local housing inventory for policymakers, and fewer unwanted calls for landlords on rented properties.

Landlords can use free tools in the system to keep a detailed online inventory of their units. “Cloning” tools make it easy to list multiple units at once. Recent viewing stats show landlords how often their available listings are being found and viewed by potential renters. An online-posting generator helps landlords advertise their ALHousingSearch.org listings via social media and other online classifieds.

Landlords can log in to free accounts 24/7 to add, update or mark listings as rented, or they can utilize the toll-free call center for help adding and updating listings.

Toll-free, bilingual call center services

The Socialserve.com professional call center is available 11 hours each weekday for live support for all ALHousingSearch.org services. It is free to call, and services are available in English and Spanish.

Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) are highly trained, cordial and passionate about helping people. With no time limit placed on calls, CSRs are able to take time to answer questions and make sure that callers are helped as much as possible. They can conduct detailed housing searches for renters and can refer callers to local resources as needed. CSRs help landlords with all aspects of the service, from adding photos to conducting market comparisons to removing listings from public view when rented.

Savvy landlords keep the toll-free number on speed dial. Call center representatives have received calls from landlords on the way home from the hardware store with a new appliance or accessibility feature to install, eager to have it added to the listing to increase the probability of quick lease-up.

Callers can receive a general overview of the Housing Choice/Section 8 process, and CSRs provide local housing authority contact information for more in-depth questions. When a housing authority moves Housing Choice/Section 8 listing management to the Socialserve.com service, CSRs conduct follow-up calls to every landlord to ensure they are aware of the service and to offer any assistance needed with listing.

Call center staff read through every listing added to the system to help prevent confusing typos, discriminatory language and Fair Housing violations. CSRs are trained to handle scam complaints and address suspicious listings immediately. The intensive human element of this web-based service is unique and adds to the immense value that ALHousingSearch.org offers the state.



A key part of the mission of the agency powering ALHousingSearch.org, Socialserve.com, is to increase accessibility to housing. This mission affects and informs many aspects of the service. The website is ADA-compliant and meets web accessibility standards. This means easier navigation of online tools with assistive technology like screen-reader and speech-recognition software and maximizes access to the service for all. The call center connects to TTY/TDD relay services, and call center representatives can provide extensive assistance with all aspects of the service, including detailed housing searches.

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Trained, authorized caseworkers are given access to search for listings for specific populations and can work with landlords to make sure client needs are met. If more units are needed to address specific needs in an area, Socialserve.com can be contracted to conduct comprehensive landlord outreach and marketing to boost particular types of listings in prescribed areas.

Accessibility

Tenants can use an “Accessible” search tool to look for housing with a broad range of features, like no-step entry, ramped access and lever-style door handles.

Landlord contact information is publically displayed and easy to find so individuals or their caseworkers can contact landlords to discuss tenant requirements and determine if a property will successfully meet those needs.

Service add-ons

Detailed up-to-date listings and full call-center assistance make ALHousingSearch.org an especially valuable tool for housing authorities. Listings let landlords indicate subsidies associated with units such as Housing Choice vouchers and income-based options. Housing counselors and individuals can search listings for units that meet individual needs and voucher specifications, and listings of private, income-based and Tax Credit properties make the service a great resource for wait-listed clients.

ALHousingSearch.org can provide full vacancy-listings management for voucher programs. Call center and web tools through ALHousingSearch.org assist landlords with listing, assist tenants with searches and keep listings up to date. This creates immense time-savings for housing agencies.

The system produces valuable local housing market data to be used for development planning and voucher de-concentration efforts.

Easy-to-use rent comparison tools exceed HUD requirements, generate printable documentation for convenience and, most importantly, draw from the most accurate and current rental market information available.

SocialServe.com offers thorough training and ongoing support for housing authority staff, landlord and tenants on ALHousingSearch.org tools.

Disaster response

Since 2003, Socialserve.com has provided swift response through tornadoes, floods, massive hurricanes and wildfires. A large component of Socialserve.com Disaster Response is the development of a disaster-housing action plan and the regular maintenance of housing information stored in ALHousingSearch.org to prepare the state *before* a disaster strikes.

During and after a crisis, Socialserve.com and ALHousingSearch.org would be mobilized to re-house victims as

rapidly as possible and to help the affected region utilize emergency funding and resources. Other activities include the following and more:

- Administering housing support to area emergency management agencies and regional coordinators
- Activating a listing of manufactured housing communities and available trailer pads to help stand up disaster trailers
- Posting messages, shelter lists and other salient alerts on the homepage as needed
- Preparing media releases and PSAs to alert the community to this centralized housing resource
- Conducting targeted outreach to key public affairs personnel in affected areas
- Having trained, experienced call center staff conduct compassionate intake and referral for disaster victims and deliver personalized search results for shelter options and critical relief services
- Outreach by a special Disaster Outreach Team to bolster listings in affected areas.

Special needs search

The Special Needs Search is a confidential caseworker tool being used by many states in the Socialserve.com network to increase housing options for special populations. This service lets landlords privately offer their units to special-needs groups, such as Veterans, the physically disabled, emancipated youth, seniors and ex-offenders.

Trained, authorized caseworkers are given access to search for listings for specific populations and can work with landlords to make sure client needs are met. If more units are needed to address specific needs in an area, Socialserve.com can be contracted to conduct comprehensive landlord outreach and marketing to boost particular types of listings in prescribed areas.

More on volunteerism in Alabama!

Push America

engages fraternity in life-changing mission

In the most recent issue of the *ACDD Advocate* we profiled many examples of young people across Alabama who were volunteering in ways that promote and support independence, advocacy, productivity, and inclusion for Alabamians with developmental disabilities. Another great example of this volunteer spirit is alive and well in Auburn.

"PUSH America was founded in 1977 as the national philanthropy for Pi Kappa Phi fraternity," said Joseph Middleton, a junior at Auburn University and past chair of the chapter's philanthropy. "Our chapter here at Auburn is very involved in this mission, but it is also a national philanthropy. Our mission is to change the way society looks at people with disabilities, and to instill a lifelong devotion of service to others in our members."

Over the past 35 years, PUSH America has raised over \$15 million dollars for accessible construction projects, with a focus on wheelchair ramps. In addition to the projects, the fraternity also trains hundreds of its members each year on issues of disability awareness and how this message of understanding and acceptance can be spread in local communities.

Current philanthropy chair Russell Anderson said the projects help others, but also open the eyes of the students doing the work.

"We recently teamed up with Alabama Rural Ministries, and they suggest families to us who would best benefit from our construction projects. We do the estimating, design, building, the whole thing. That is one way Joe (Middleton) helps out – he is a Building Science major here at Auburn and

brings that hard-earned classroom knowledge to the table in a 'real world' setting."

Both Middleton and Anderson say the benefits go far beyond the families on the receiving end of the ramps.

"It's really kind of cool the way the whole thing works out," Anderson said. "We go out and meet the family early on and at least one family member has a physical or



Joseph Middleton (l) and Russell Anderson



"At our last project, when we finished this little kid in a wheelchair just went flying down the ramp, yelling and laughing and having a great time. I'm not sure who was enjoying it more: the little kid or all the guys who had worked on the project."

intellectual disability, or sometimes both. The guys with us are kind of joking around on the way out there and then we go in the house and it's a different setting than what most of them are used to. Everyone gets quiet and looks around but eventually we get to know the family and it's just a great experience."

Middleton agreed.

"The families love it," he said. "A lot of them can't always get out in the community so it's nice in that way, but they also just have an easier time with a wheelchair ramp and accessibility to their place. At our last project, when we finished this little kid in a wheelchair just went flying down the ramp, yelling and laughing and having a great time. I'm not sure who was enjoying it more: the little kid or all the guys who had worked on the project."

In addition to PUSH America, the Pi Kappa Phi brothers also serve at Camp ASCCA in a one-on-one "Fun Fish" weekend, and various other projects that generally serve people with disabilities and raise awareness of disability issues.

"It's unique among American fraternities to have this kind of focus, and we wouldn't change a thing," Anderson concluded. "Our guys learn to grow in respect and understanding, and the families end up with an accessible way to get in and out of their home. Everybody wins."

To learn more about PUSH America visit its website at www.pushamerica.org.

Understanding “Obamacare” in the State of Alabama –

Hambrick

presents Affordable Care Act overview to Council



At its most recent quarterly meeting, the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities heard from Dollie Hambrick, an organizer from Alabama Arise. The Arise Citizens’ Policy Project is a nonprofit statewide coalition 150 congregations and organizations dedicated to improving the lives of low-income Alabamians.

Hambrick’s presentation was entitled “Making health care reform work for Alabama: What the Affordable Care Act means for a high-poverty state.” A basic premise of the presentation was to help leaders from agencies around the state learn more about the Affordable

Care Act (also known as “Obamacare”), understand what the law has already done and will do, and what Council members could do to help others in the state benefit from the new law.

Hambrick emphasized that most people know fairly little about the Act, and that many of its provisions are still being worked out. There are some things we know about Obamacare: as of 2014 there will be no more “pre-existing condition” exclusions for children; no more annual benefit limits; and a cap on annual out-of-pocket expenses. Among other things, the new law provides free preventive care, more affordable prescription drugs for seniors, and allows young adults to stay on their parents’ plans to age 26. The “big idea” in Hambrick’s presentation was that the ACA is a “game-changer” that provides affordable coverage for millions of people, provides new protections for all health insurance consumers, and prevents discrimination by insurance companies.

Unfortunately, many people who work hard in low-income jobs in our state make too much money to receive Medicaid, but not enough on the other hand to purchase private health insurance. Is there anything these “working poor” can do about this?

To help Council members better understand the complex problems facing thousands of Alabamians, Hambrick provided summaries and explanations written by policy analysts at Alabama Arise. One of those pieces on Medicaid expansion is included below, and is presented to help our readers learn more about these new laws and the choices facing Alabama’s citizens.

There are some things we know about Obamacare: as of 2014 there will be no more “pre-existing condition” exclusions for children; no more annual benefit limits; and a cap on annual out-of-pocket expenses. Among other things, the new law provides free preventive care, more affordable prescription drugs for seniors, and allows young adults to stay on their parents’ plans to age 26. The “big idea” in Hambrick’s presentation was that the ACA is a “game-changer” that provides affordable coverage for millions of people, provides new protections for all health insurance consumers, and prevents discrimination by insurance companies.

This policy essay does not necessarily represent the position of the Council or its individual members.

Health Security

for Alabama's Working Families



*By M.J. Ellington and Jim Carnes,
Arise Citizens' Policy Project*

They are the folks who keep things going – the people who serve our food at restaurants, bag our groceries, patch our roofs and repair our cars. We may wonder or even inquire about their lives, but chances are, we don't think much about their health insurance. Yet many hardworking Alabamians in low-wage, economically essential jobs have no health coverage. As a result, they often struggle to work with health problems that sap their productivity, add stress to their households and get worse without timely care.

Imagine what it would mean to the state's business community to have a workforce with access to regular health care. Imagine the effect on the state's education system if all children came to school healthy and ready to prepare for tomorrow's jobs.



Without Medicaid, many hospitals, doctors' offices and specialized treatment centers would go out of business. The federal government pays 68 cents of every dollar Medicaid spends in Alabama, and the state picks up the remaining 32 cents.

Hundreds of thousands of Alabamians are caught in the health coverage gap. Working at low-wage jobs that often don't offer health insurance, they earn too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to afford private insurance. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) bridges this gap by helping states

expand Medicaid to people with income up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), just under \$15,000 a year for an individual and \$31,000 for a family of four. Uninsured people earning above this amount and up to 400 percent of FPL will qualify for sliding-scale tax credits to help buy insurance through a state health insurance exchange, the ACA's other main tool for expanding coverage. This fact sheet examines what's at stake for Alabama in deciding whether to expand Medicaid.

A new option

Alabama Medicaid has been successful in providing health care for children in low-income families, seniors living in nursing homes and people with disabilities. We can build on these successes and make coverage affordable for more working families. Alabama Medicaid now excludes most adults without children, as well as parents making above 12 percent of the federal poverty line; for example, the annual parent income limit is \$1,644 for a family of two and \$2,328 for a family of four. Despite these tight limits on direct Medicaid coverage, all Alabamians benefit from the services and facilities that Medicaid funding makes possible. Without Medicaid, many hospitals, doctors' offices and specialized treatment centers would go out of business. The federal government pays 68 cents of every dollar Medicaid spends in Alabama, and the state picks up the remaining 32 cents.

As signed into law, the ACA required states to expand Medicaid for everyone up to 133 percent FPL, with generous federal funding, or lose funding for their existing programs. Following state challenges, the U.S. Supreme Court in

June 2012 upheld the ACA overall but made Medicaid expansion optional. The ruling allows states to keep federal funding for current Medicaid programs but reject expansion.

Gov. Robert Bentley said in November that Alabama will not expand Medicaid “under the current structure.” There is no deadline for states to decide on expansion. Reforms to Medicaid services and funding at the state or federal level could convince Gov. Bentley to do so. Advisory bodies named by the Legislature and the Governor are working on proposals to reform Medicaid for the 2013 legislative session.

While the option to expand Medicaid will remain open, the clock is ticking on the financial incentives for expansion. The ACA provides full federal funding to cover newly eligible Medicaid recipients for three years, beginning Jan. 1, 2014. In 2017, states will pick up a small share that grows to a maximum of 10 percent for 2020 and after. Delaying the decision means failing to take advantage of maximum federal funding. Alabama can’t afford to walk away from billions of federal dollars that could revitalize our health care system and entire economy.

Everyone will gain

Medicaid expansion in Alabama would likely bring health coverage to 300,000 new enrollees, according to a study by researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) School of Public Health. Analysis of Census data further reveals that nearly 60 percent of Alabama’s uninsured adults who fall within the new income limits are workers.

Resources

- An Economic Evaluation of Medicaid Expansion in Alabama under the Affordable Care Act (David J. Becker & Michael A. Morrissey; Department of Health Care Organization and Policy, School of Public Health, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Nov. 5, 2012).
- “Medicaid Coverage and Spending in Health Reform: National and State-By-State Results for Adults at or Below 133 % FPL” (John Holahan & Irene Headen; Urban Institute and Kaiser Family Foundation, May 2010).
- Opting Out of the Medicaid Expansion under the ACA: How Many Uninsured Adults Would Not Be Eligible for Medicaid?” (Genevieve Kenny, et al.; Urban Institute, July 2012).
- Alabama Medicaid 2011 Annual Report

An expanded Medicaid would provide:

- Health coverage for hardworking families who can’t afford private coverage;
- Access to regular care/preventive checkups;
- Earlier detection/treatment;
- Less dependence on costly emergency care;
- Regular OB/GYN visits without referral;
- Coverage for 27,000 low-income uninsured Alabama veterans.

Medicaid expansion means a healthier Alabama. The whole state will benefit as access to regular care improves the health of working families and more of our sickest residents. Most parents want to take responsibility for their health and that of their children; they just need to have the obstacles removed. Healthier families mean better outcomes at school and on the job. A more productive workforce means a growing state economy, more jobs and a vibrant future.

Medicaid expansion is a wise investment in our economic future. The UAB study authors estimate that, from 2014 through 2020, Alabama would spend \$771 million on Medicaid expansion and receive \$11.7 billion in federal matching funds. The study projects that the new federal spending would generate \$20 billion in related private-sector growth and another \$1.7 billion in state tax revenue for the same seven-year period. Since the state doesn’t begin paying expansion costs until 2017, we can develop plans now for getting the maximum return on our investment.

What we stand to lose

If Alabama rejects Medicaid expansion, some 300,000 uninsured low-income Alabamians will be left without affordable health coverage. People with incomes above 100 percent of FPL will qualify for premium subsidies to help buy private insurance in the new marketplace called the health insurance exchange. But because the exchange is intended to serve people making above the expanded Medicaid limit of 133 percent of FPL, the subsidies may not make insurance affordable for people below that income.

From a broader perspective, rejecting Medicaid expansion would mean the people of Alabama, who pay the same federal taxes as people in other states, would receive lower returns on that investment. Alabamians deserve the same benefits from reform as people in other states. Our state’s economy deserves the same boost from federal spending in the health care industry.

Bottom line

Thousands of hardworking Alabamians stand to gain health security from Medicaid expansion. Our businesses stand to gain a more reliable workforce. Our economy stands to gain an infusion of federal dollars, more tax revenues and thousands of new health care jobs. Expanding coverage for less than a dime on the dollar is a bargain Alabama can’t afford to pass up.

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Council mourns the loss of

Beverly Gardner

By Johnna Breland

"God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called."



The Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities lost a great friend and caring Council member on February 25, when Beverly Gardner passed away from complications relating to surgery. This was a real shock to me because Beverly and I shared some of the very best and very worst times of our lives together, and she had just recently celebrated coming through all of her surgeries OK. But then she developed liver and kidney issues and died unexpectedly. Her family of course is devastated to lose such a wonderful and loving life-force.

I met Beverly several years ago when I was serving as president of the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association. She asked me if I would advocate on her child's behalf at an ISP meeting and we just grew together from there.

Beverly and I became very close through our lives as foster and adoptive parents, especially with the

number and kinds of children we had, and so of course we had many joys and sorrows in common. Although we didn't necessarily speak on the phone or visit every week, whenever we sat down together she understood the things that no one else could - how ridiculous and wonderful and scary things could become. She always "got it," and with that wicked sense of humor you just always felt better after talking to her.

Beverly was a huge person in a small package. She was witty, funny, and always willing to help anyone in any way that she could. And she would not back down from a fight, particularly if it had to do with the welfare of a child.

Beverly and her husband Sam had at least 100 foster children come through their home over the years. They ended up with 17 children of their own, and still mourned the death of their beloved Kenzie. I think it is most fitting that the Council remember Beverly. I will miss her terribly, and I know in this way I am not alone. I'll always remember her creed: "God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called."



EDITOR'S NOTE: To read a story about Beverly, her family and her work as a caring advocate for foster and adoptive children, see the Spring 2007 issue of the *ACDD Advocate* (Vol II, Number 1). This and all other back issues are available at www.acdd.org.



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