

# TriAngle

Vol. 8, No. 3, October 2004

## Challenging the Barriers: Casting a Vote

Almost four years ago, the physical act of casting a vote suddenly became a very contentious national issue--one that would eventually be settled, sort of, by the U.S. Supreme Court.

We all remember how Florida voters had to contend with uncertain, difficult-to-use technology in order to cast a vote. We remember that thousands of votes were not counted. Can you say "hanging chad?" In short, many voters did not cast a valid vote because the physical act of casting a vote was too technically demanding. For decades, this has been the reality on Election Day for thousands of would-be voters with disabilities. Although not as prevalent as in the past, inaccessible voting places are a reality for people who use wheelchairs or who have trouble seeing, walking or climbing steps.

Recently, in New Orleans, some of us who have disabilities encountered a new barrier to casting a vote--no voting machines. Of course, no one in more than 50 voting places cast a vote for a good part of the day. I suppose one could say the playing field was finally leveled — for a few hours, anyway.

Each year we hear stories of voters with disabilities who still encounter physical and other barriers when trying to vote. Reports persist of voters with disabilities who are challenged by polling place workers on competence issues or when they ask for assistance in casting a vote.

The Advocacy Center has launched a voters' rights education project that will address these and other similar issues directly through "Train the Trainers" forums across the state. Earlier this year, Advocacy Center staff joined with the Secretary of State's Office to create a voters' rights educational film that is being used as a teaching tool when the Clerks of Court in each of the state's 64 parishes conduct polling worker training. Advocacy Center staff is available to conduct additional training on voting rights. Agencies or consumer groups may call the Advocacy Center to arrange a voting rights training or presentation.

In addition, the Advocacy Center will partner with and provide

*(Continued on page 2)*

This issue of TriAngle is focused on the Advocacy Center. In light of recent difficulties and misunderstandings, the editors have chosen to use this issue of the TriAngle to better explain the role of the Advocacy Center and how the lives of people with disabilities are improved through the work of this important agency.

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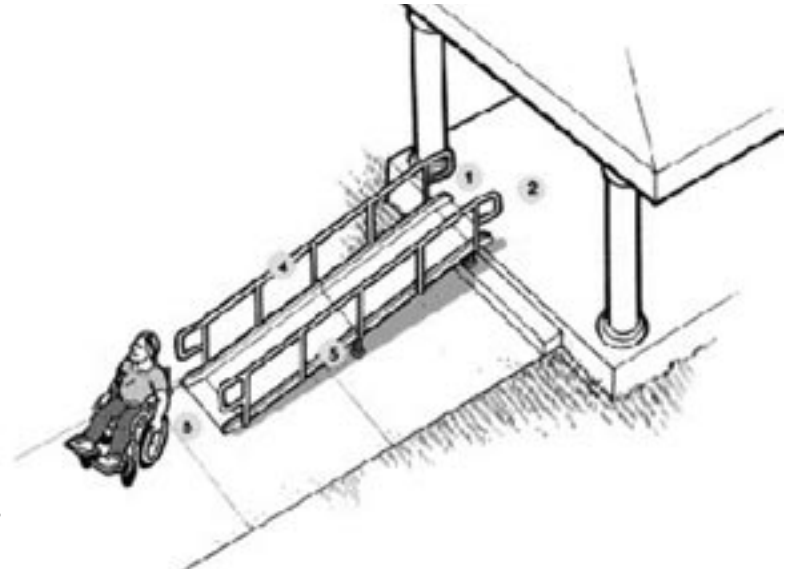
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technical support to contractors in each of the state's seven congressional districts who, on Election Day, will conduct accessibility surveys of a sample number of voting places in their respective districts. Survey results will be used to determine the degree of local compliance with both state and federal voting place accessibility standards. The Advocacy Center will work with local parish officials to make changes so that polling places are accessible.

To complete both the projects described above, the Advocacy Center and the Secretary of State's Office have partnered with Southwest Louisiana Independent Living Center, New Horizons Independent Living Center, Bayou Land Families Helping Families, Louisiana Assistive Technology Access Network, Easter Seals, and Pyramid Parent Community Resource Center.

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Louisiana voters will cast their votes for President, members of Congress, and assorted local officials. The Advocacy Center urges all Louisiana voters to exercise their privilege to vote. If you are a voter

with a disability and encounter a barrier to casting your vote, please contact the Advocacy Center by calling 800-960-7705 ext 140. If you are not a registered voter and need help registering, or if you need a voter registration application, call the number above.



*Features of an Accessible Ramp*

## Accommodations for Prisoners and Their Families

The Advocacy Center has had several recent successes in getting the Louisiana Department of Corrections to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act in its treatment of prisoners and their families. Last year, we negotiated with the Warden and the Administrative Director of Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola to improve parking facilities and remove barriers in the path of travel to make Death Row visiting facilities accessible to family members using wheelchairs. We also assisted an inmate who was hearing impaired to obtain a new parole hearing with a sign language interpreter and an attorney. He had been denied the services of an interpreter at the hearing at which his parole was revoked, and spent several months in prison before the new hearing resulted in his release. This year, a Parole Board again denied

an interpreter to an inmate who is deaf, until the Advocacy Center interceded on his behalf and made sure that the interpreter was provided.

Several cases in which the Advocacy Center is attempting to obtain reasonable accommodations for prisoners with disabilities are still pending, including a lawsuit to require the Department to transport prisoners in wheelchair-accessible vans, negotiations to obtain hearing aids and assistive technology for an inmate who is visually-impaired, sign language interpreters at disciplinary hearings, and architectural accessibility at recently-constructed prisons. The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections still has a long way to go before full compliance with the ADA is a matter of routine.

## Advocating for Systems Change Through Collaborative Efforts

When Congress in its wisdom passed the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act creating Developmental Disabilities Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, it included a provision that these three entities must collaborate with one another to achieve the purpose of the law. In Louisiana, these three agencies that make up the DD Network - the Council, the Advocacy Center, and the Human Development Center - collaborate often and on numerous initiatives so people with developmental disabilities and their families can have access to individualized supports in their communities that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and inclusion in all facets of community life. Together, we carry out our mandate of advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities.

The Council, the Advocacy Center, and the Human Development Center do not collaborate simply because it is mandated by Congress. We are a unique and effective partnership focused on improving services and supports for people with disabilities and their families. Working together, using our own different and distinctive specialties, we work on many diverse, yet complementary, levels to make a difference for people with disabilities and their families in Louisiana. In Louisiana, whether it is individual or systems advocacy, complaint resolution or capacity building and systemic change, education and training or research, if it involves services, supports, or issues related to individuals with disabilities, at least one of the Network agencies is going to be involved in it.



This newsletter is one example of our collaborative efforts. Another is our work to try to balance the system of services for people with disabilities in Louisiana. This advocacy work is so important because our state continues to be at or near the top of every list when it comes to the number of people per capita in developmental centers, ICFs/MR, and nursing homes and near the bottom when the factor is money spent on individual and family supports for people to live in their own homes. The scales of justice for people with disabilities in Louisiana are very imbalanced, tilting heavily on the side of money spent on institutional services, leaving very little for those wishing to receive supports in their own homes. Our state continues to over-utilize costly 24 hour institutional services and maintain an investment in bricks and mortar, while approximately 8,000 people with developmental disabilities are on a waiting list for Medicaid home and community-based waiver services. Another 3,000 elderly citizens or people with other disabilities are waiting for other Medicaid community-based waivers.

These and other issues are important to people with disabilities and their families, and they are the reason the DD Network agencies exist. The Council, the Advocacy Center, and the Human Development Center will continue to advocate for, develop and sustain, and provide information on issues important to everyone touched by disability. Working together, we will strive on all levels to help secure available, high quality community services and supports people want and, most importantly, deserve.

## Collaboration between the Human Development Center and the Advocacy Center

The purpose of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, P.L. 106-402, (DD Act) is to “assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life.” As such, the DD Act authorizes and funds three programs in Louisiana to carry out specific activities related to fulfilling its purpose. The three agencies are the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council (LA DDC, the Advocacy Center (AC), and the Human Development Center (HDC). These agencies have a positive history of working collaboratively on projects designed to fulfill the purpose of the DD Act. Three recent collaborative projects include a housing initiative, a collaborative focused on transition-aged youth, and the production of an educational video to inform individuals and family members of the possibilities of living in the community with the assistance of a Home and Community-Based Services waiver (HCBS).

**Educational Video.** Staff of HDC and the AC worked together to develop a video/DVD designed to provide information about Medicaid funded HCBS waiver (i.e., Supported Independent Living) options from the perspectives of persons with significant disabilities and/or their families. This video was produced at the request of the Louisiana Team to serve as a resource for families or self-advocates considering participating in a HCBS waiver. The AC’s Ombudsman program was instrumental in identifying, recruiting, and obtaining appropriate consents from the persons who were

featured in the video. HDC staff filmed participants and created the videotape, with input from the Advocacy Center’s Director, Ms. Lois Simpson, as well as members of the Louisiana Team. The video provides viewers an opportunity to hear the perspectives of persons with significant disabilities and their families as they candidly discuss their concerns and satisfaction with waiver services.

**Housing Initiative.** Another area where HDC has effectively collaborated with the Advocacy Center relates to fair housing. Most recently, these two agencies, along with the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, developed and submitted a col-



laborative grant proposal in response to an RFP from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The AC would be the fiscal agent for this proposed project, Louisiana’s Fair Housing Education and Outreach Project: Disability Component. The purpose of the project is to address a pressing need in southwest and south central Louisiana: a lack of coordinated, collaborative, ongoing, and accessible education and outreach activities for individuals with disabilities, their family members, their service providers, and others protected by federal, state, and local fair housing laws about all aspects of fair housing rights.

**Transition Youth.** During the 2003-2004 school year, Benefits Specialists from the Adolescent and Adult Services Development Program’s Louisiana

Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach Project (LA-BPAO) successfully collaborated with the AC’s Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program in reaching hundreds of transition youth throughout the State. Representatives from both LA-BPAO and PABSS met with students, parents, and teachers to provide work incentives planning and assistance to Social Security Administration’s (SSA) transition youth beneficiaries with disabilities and to explain the many employment supports offered by the SSA. Other topics presented by both organizations included the Ticket to Work Program, information and advice about receiving vocational rehabilitation and employment services,

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and other related services that beneficiaries with disabilities may need to secure gainful employment. PABSS and LA-BPAO representatives continue to work closely with individuals of all ages to assure that individuals who receive SSA disability benefits secure the knowledge needed to make informed choices about returning to work.

The above are just a few examples of the collaboration conducted between the Human Development Center and the Advocacy Center. The Human Development Center will continue to collaborate with the Advocacy Center, the DD Council, and other agencies in order to promote and support choice, independence, productivity, self-determination, and integration into the community for our fellow citizens with disabilities.

## The Advocacy Center – Who We Are and What We Do

The Advocacy Center (AC) is Louisiana's protection and advocacy system. Protection and advocacy systems were established in 1975 to protect and advocate for individuals with developmental disabilities. Over the past 30 years, the mission has been expanded to include individuals with all types of disabilities in Louisiana.

This mission is accomplished in many different ways. There are seven major types of work performed by the Advocacy Center. These are:

**Information and Referral** – The Intake Specialists at the Advocacy Center are extremely knowledgeable about resources throughout Louisiana. They often suggest alternatives when AC cannot assist with an issue. AC also publishes a variety of flyers, booklets, and reports which are designed to empower people to advocate for themselves.

**Legal Assistance** - The Advocacy Center represents clients in areas of the law designated as priorities by its Board of Directors. Legal representation includes counseling, advice, research, negotiation, administrative review, administrative hearing, state office review, litigation, and class action. If a person needs legal representation in a non-priority area, the staff can make referrals to other sources of legal representation. **Legal assistance is offered only when the issue is specifically related to the disability of the client.**

**Systems Advocacy** -The Advocacy Center works to improve systems that are used by people who are elderly and/or have disabilities, including education, health, legal,

social services, transportation, and vocational systems.

**Outreach and Training**-The Advocacy Center educates others about the legal rights of persons who are elderly and persons who have disabilities through presentations to groups, participation on committees and task forces, media campaigns, technical assistance flyers, and educational booklets.

**Legislative Information and Education** – The Advocacy Center provides information to legislators and people with disabilities about laws and pending laws of concern to the disability and senior communities.



**Ombudsman Visits** – The ombudsmen at the Advocacy Center visit persons in nursing homes and community homes to protect residents' rights and ensure a high quality of life for all residents.

**Investigations** – This unit investigates incidents of serious abuse or neglect in institutions and engages in systems advocacy to insure people with disabilities living in institutions are safe.

Each year the Advocacy Center sets priorities and case selection criteria which guide its work in the area of individual legal representation. Areas of focus include:

**Access:** issues involving physical and programmatic access to public facilities and programs including

accessibility issues to governmental facilities and programs, as well as those open to the public and run by private entities where there is the potential for widespread impact.

**Assistive Technology:** issues involving access to assistive technology in institutions and in the community.

**Financial Entitlements:** issues involving public benefits and financial entitlement programs, including Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security (SSI and SSDI).

**Employment/ Rehabilitation:** issues involving Louisiana Rehabilitation Services and employment for people with disabilities.

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**Institutions:** issues involving the rights of individuals living in institutions and involuntary discharges from nursing homes and group homes.

**Self Determination:** issues involving continuing tutorship and interdiction, representative payee, and Adult Protective Services in order to maximize the independence of the person with a disability.

**Special Education:** issues involving transition planning, discipline, least restrictive environment, and programmatic accessibility.

All assistance is free of charge to residents of Louisiana. For more information on the services of the Advocacy Center, call 1-800-960-7705 or visit [www.advocacyla.org](http://www.advocacyla.org).

## Presidential Candidates Address Disability Issues

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) sent President Bush and Presidential candidate John Kerry the same eight questions to solicit their positions on a range of disability issues. The TriAngle editors have chosen to include responses to the following two questions. The entire response of each candidate can be found at <http://www.aapd-dc.org/campaign04/indexcampaign.html>.

### **If you are elected/re-elected what will be your top three priorities during your first 100 days in office to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities living in the U.S.?**

Bush Response:

I will continue to pursue the policies I proposed in the New Freedom Initiative - the most comprehensive proposal since the ADA that is focused on removing barriers faced by people with disabilities - and I will remain open to new ideas to assist people with disabilities as technologies develop or new needs arise.

Kerry Response

I will offer Americans with disabilities freedom, independence, and choices. I will appoint a national bipartisan Community First Commission made up of distinguished Americans, including people with disabilities who will identify short and long term policy reforms that could and should be pursued to:

\* Guarantee that all Americans with disabilities who can live in their community with affordable supports have equal opportunity to do so regardless of age, disability, state of residence, employment status, or necessary form of assistance.

\* Create a greater federal role in equitable financing and enhancing the qual-

ity and appropriateness of long-term services.

\* Eliminate the institutional bias in Medicaid and Medicare that robs millions of Americans of their most basic freedoms, dignity, and daily independence.

To make our system work and to offer real choices, we must ensure equal access to quality home and community services throughout our nation. I will work with the Community First Commission to determine how we can move MiCASSA forward. And I will work with states to fully implement the Olmstead Decision, as well as push Congress to finally pass the Family Opportunity Act.

I believe we need full mental health parity once and for all - not just mental health parity for certain benefits or certain mental health conditions or with unnecessary loopholes that allow insurers to skirt their responsibility. I will fight to pass full mental health parity legislation.

I will utilize the skills and wisdom of the disability community in shaping policy and programs that will benefit the entire country, and I will seek out qualified people with disabilities to serve throughout my administration.

Americans with disabilities deserve independence and the opportunity to be economically self-sufficient. I will reinstate the executive order by President Bill Clinton to hire 100,000 qualified individuals with disabilities as federal employees over five years. I will crack down on employment discrimination and nominate an Attorney General for the U.S. Department of Justice and a Chair to the EEOC who will make enforcement of the ADA a top priority.

And I will promote creative solutions to address the transportation, technology, and housing needs for individuals with disabilities.

To ensure that children with disabilities get the free, high quality education they deserve, I am committed to fully funding IDEA and working for strong enforcement and real compliance with the law. And to expand access to higher education, I will improve transitional planning, promote access and awareness in disability services, provide work-study alternatives, and collect data on students with disabilities to provide a true scientific understanding of the realities on the ground.

**What ideas do you have for bringing our four largest federal programs (Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Security Income, and Social Security Disability Insurance) in line with the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act (equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency)?**

Bush Response:

The ADA is an excellent start in affording everyone an equal chance at success, but more must be done. My commitment to the 20% of Americans with disabilities is demonstrated in my New Freedom Initiative. I secured funding for a number of projects aimed at removing disincentives to work that currently exist in the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability benefit system. And in June 2001, I signed an Executive Order to create "Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities," directing agencies to require States to place qualified individuals with mental disabilities in community settings, rather than in institutions. The "Ticket to Work" law extends Medi-

care coverage for SSDI beneficiaries so employees can return to work without the fear of losing health benefits. It also expands Medicaid eligibility categories for certain working people with severe disabilities so that they can continue to receive benefits after their income or condition improves.

I also created the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, which is responsible for conducting a comprehensive study of the Nation's mental health service delivery system. The Commission recommended improvements to enable adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbances to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. My Administration is working to address the improvements recommended in the report.

**Kerry Response:**

We must strengthen and protect Medicaid, not tear it apart. I am firmly opposed to the Bush administration's proposal to turn Medicaid into a block grant program. By investing in Medicaid, we can improve the health and independence of more than 10 million children, adults, and older Americans with disabilities throughout our country. No one should be forced to be in a nursing home or have their most basic needs go unmet because they live in a state that chooses not to offer necessary community living services. That is why I believe that we need to relieve pressures on state budgets; I have proposed spending \$25 billion to help states struggling to bridge their deficits.

I support strengthening and improving Medicaid in several key ways. First, I believe that we must pass the Family Opportunity Act. Currently, low-income families with severely disabled children receive federal disability benefits under Supplemental Security Income. However, if parents seek a better job or earn higher wages, their disabled children

lose Medicaid coverage, which is essential to providing comprehensive coverage for children who require complex and often costly care. No parent should have to turn down a job or give up custody of a child to ensure that he or she gets health care.

We need to fully implement the Olmstead decision. People with disabilities and older Americans must receive the support they need to live in their own homes and communities. States must be given increased resources and tools to carry out the Olmstead decision and must be held accountable for doing so. Americans with disabilities must be assured equal access to quality home and community living services.



I will work with the Community First Commission to determine how we can best implement MiCASSA and the Money Follows the Person Act. We need to end the institutional bias that makes it impossible for millions of Americans to exercise the most basic of human liberties: freedom, choice, and independence.

I will work toward eliminating the two-year waiting period to become eligible for Medicare. The federal government has a critical role to play to assure that workers with disabilities have the insurance coverage they need to be as independent and productive as possible. And I will direct HHS to fund a series of demonstrations aimed at identifying cost effective ways that best promote the health, independence and productivity of people with disabilities and to

promote better health care.

I will also work to provide real prescription drug relief through the Medicare program. My health care plan will lower prescription drug costs, and ensure that seniors and people with disabilities on Medicare can choose their doctors instead of forcing them to join an HMO.

Another important program to millions of Americans with disabilities is the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA). TWWIIA seeks to guarantee continued access to vital Medicare and Medicaid coverage to enable individuals with significant disabilities to become competitively employed under certain conditions.

As a result of this law, about half of the states today allow employed individuals with disabilities to buy into Medicaid if their incomes and assets do not exceed certain limits and meet other criteria set by each state. These Medicaid buy-in programs vary widely from one state to another, however, both in regard to the eligibility requirements they set and the benefits and services they make available. Moreover, if the current economic downturn continues, states that currently have these plans in place may have to cut back or eliminate them all together. In addition, few other states will be in a position to create new buy-in programs.

The federal government must play a far greater role in ensuring that workers with disabilities have the insurance coverage they need to be as independent and productive as possible. Regardless of where these individuals live or how much they are able to earn, they should be able to buy in to a uniform, national set of benefits designed to do just this. To help achieve these ends, the Medicare program should provide for enhanced coverage for employed individuals with disabilities.



## Resources

**Did you know you can get  
TriAngle on-line?**

**To sign up for the  
on-line version, go to  
<http://www.ladir.org/news/>**

**Autism National Committee (AUT-COM)** serves as a national “think tank” advancing the research, understanding and practice of positive, relationship- and communication-based approaches to assisting children and adults with autism. [www.autcom.org](http://www.autcom.org)

**Community Resources for Independence (CRI)** is committed to preserve, enhance, and enrich the quality of life for all people with disabilities. By embracing our mission, Community Resources for Independence, Inc. will strive, in partnership with others, to empower people with disabilities to become fully integrated into society. [www.crinet.org](http://www.crinet.org)

**Center for Independent Living (CIL)** is an organization run by and for persons with disabilities that assists persons with a wide variety of disabilities to achieve and maintain independent lifestyles as defined and requested by the individual(s) seeking such assistance. [www.libertyresources.org](http://www.libertyresources.org)

**Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA)/Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee** is an active committee composed of 20

volunteer members from the Bar Association who have a common interest in assisting people with disabilities. The mission is to provide members of the bench, bar, and public with a greater understanding of the legal needs and rights of people with disabilities, to better meet these needs and to increase the knowledge that people with disabilities have regarding their right and resources. For more information about LSBA, call 504-566-1600.

**National Council on Disability (NCD)** is an independent federal agency making recommendations to the President and Congress on issues affecting Americans with disabilities. NCD is composed of 15 members appointed by the President and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. In its 1986 report “Toward Independence,” NCD first proposed that Congress should enact a civil rights law for people with disabilities. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law. [www.ncd.gov](http://www.ncd.gov)

**Hamilton Internet Protocol Relay (HIP Relay)** is a 24-hour service that allows individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Speech Disabled to use computers and other web devices to connect to HIP Relay via the Internet in order to place a call to any standard telephone user, VCO user, or HCO user. For more information please contact Customer Service at 1-800-618-4781 (V/TTY), 1-402-694-5110 (Fax), or send e-mail to [hirelay@hamiltonrelay.com](mailto:hirelay@hamiltonrelay.com).

**National Association for Down Syndrome (NADS)** goals are to promote an environment which fosters the growth and development of people with Down syndrome to enable them to achieve their full potential, to provide support and information on Down syndrome to parents, and disseminate

up-to-date information on Down syndrome. [www.nads.org](http://www.nads.org)

### **Predatory Lending Project**

Seniors who have been victims of predatory lending can get legal assistance by calling Rita Pereira, Predatory Lending Project, New Orleans Legal Assistance, 504-529-1000 x 231. To be eligible for this help, clients must be 60 or over. It is expected that most clients will seek help when their homes are in foreclosure because they haven't paid their mortgage, though any senior who believes he or she may have been a victim of a shady lending practice may apply.

**Louisiana Assistive Technology Access Network (LATAN)** is looking for a few good men and women. There are many volunteer opportunities for you to help LATAN move forward in providing assistive technology services needed by individuals in the state. Call 800-270-6185 or 225-925-9500 or email: [jnesbit@latan.org](mailto:jnesbit@latan.org) for more information.

### **LATAN Computer ReBoot Program**

The LATAN ReBoot Program is a reduced-cost computer distribution program. Participants will receive a Pentium computer with monitor, keyboard, mouse, cables and Windows 9 Additionalng system for \$90.00. Additional packages are available for an additional cost. Computer packages are delivered to participant's door. This program is a collaborative effort between LATAN and Georgia Tools for Life. Contact Henry Bateman, LATAN, for information and an application, 1-800-638-6115 or email: [hbateman@latan.org](mailto:hbateman@latan.org) Website [www.latan.org](http://www.latan.org)

## Investigating Abuse and Neglect

Since its inception in April 2003 the Investigations Unit of the Advocacy Center has experienced a steady increase in the scope of its activities. The initial concentration was on unfortunate incidents of death resulting from restraint use in facilities such as hospitals and nursing homes. Currently the unit's focus has expanded to include injuries resulting from restraint use in a variety of facilities, deaths resulting from negligence in nursing homes, abuse incidents involving juveniles in psychiatric facilities, and abuse or neglect in state hospitals and developmental centers.

### **Federal Law Gives AC Access**

Federal law requires facilities such as those mentioned above to release otherwise protected records of individuals with the permission of either the person or their legal guardian. In limited instances, facilities are required to provide records when a legal guardian refuses to cooperate. In incidents involving the death of an individual, records are released to the Advocacy Center if there is "probable cause" to suspect that abuse or neglect was a factor in the person's death.

### **National Study to Shed Light on Restraint-Related Deaths**

Recently, the Investigations Unit participated in a nationwide restraint death study being conducted by the Illinois Protection and Advocacy System. The purpose of the study is to determine whether restraint use is contributing to deaths that are not attributed to restraint use by coroners' reports or hospital records. The Illinois P & A has assembled volunteer doctors, coroners, and other professionals to review medical records and investigative reports to assist in their study. For its part, the Advocacy Center sent reports and thousands of pages of hospital

records involving three restraint related deaths, as well as records and information on two additional deaths for which the Advocacy Center determined that no abuse or neglect was involved, and where restraints - although in use at the time of both deaths - were not deemed contributing factors.

### **Improved Conditions on Locked Ward in Mental Health Hospital**

A recent investigation involved one of the Louisiana state hospitals for persons with mental illness. The Advocacy Center received a complaint that a large percentage of women in a locked ward were found sleeping during unannounced visits. The ward was subsequently routinely visited and the number of women sleeping was monitored. The Advocacy Center suspected the women were either bored or over-medicated; in any case the sleeping issue was not being addressed by the facility. A letter, sent to the Chief Executive Officer addressed the concerns of the Advocacy Center and requested a meeting with hospital officials. On July 27, 2004, three AC employees met with the CEO and other senior officials at the facility to discuss the concerns expressed in the letter. The director and staff of the facility laid out ambitious plans to improve conditions on the locked unit, reduce restraint use, provide better programming, and improve communication among staff. The Advocacy Center was invited to become an ad hoc member of the new committee formed to address concerns raised in the original letter.

### **Training and Policy Changes at Developmental Center**

The Investigations Unit also affected changes in the policies of a local Developmental Center. Earlier this year a juvenile resident's arm was broken in one restraint incident and stitches

from an eye injury were reopened in a separate restraint incident involving the same young man. A lengthy report was prepared following an investigation into the restraint incidents and a review of the resident's records. In the report, the Advocacy Center made numerous suggestions for changes in restraint policy and reporting accuracy, including requiring restraint training for all personnel involved in restraint incidents. In a meeting held in September with officials from the facility, the Advocacy Center learned that the recommended policy changes have taken place.

### **Current and Future Cases**

The Investigations Unit is looking into the case of a young man who was sexually assaulted at one of the Louisiana State Hospitals on or about July 1, 2004 during a time in which he was reportedly under direct supervision of staff. The Advocacy Center learned of the assault from an ombudsman and immediately began an investigation. The young man in question has been removed from the hospital at which the attack took place and now resides in a different facility.

The Investigations Unit will continue to research and report on situations such as those described above. It is the Advocacy Center's hope that these investigations will lead to positive changes throughout the state's programs and facilities that serve people with disabilities and the elderly. If you are aware of a situation involving abuse and/or neglect and you do not believe the situation has been fairly resolved, please feel free to contact the Advocacy Center and let us know about it. The Advocacy Center will do its best to investigate the situation and provide any feedback possible.



# Quarterly Events Calendar

## October

**11** LANO Standards of Excellence, 9 a.m. to Noon, United Way, Monroe, 1-888-300-1320.  
IEP Workshop – 10 a.m. to Noon, FHF, Pineville, 1-800-259-7200.  
**12** Positive Behavior Supports – FHF SWLA, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., Lake Charles, 1-800-894-6558.  
**14** CSHS Training, BR, 1-888-300-1320.  
Comprehensive Plan of Care –FHF, 10 a.m. to Noon, Metairie, 1-800-766-7736.  
**13 & 19** Basic Rights in Special Ed. - FHF SWLA, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Resource Management, Lake Charles, 1-800-894-6558.  
**19-20** Social Capital in America Conference, Atlantic City, NJ, marketing@thecouncil.org.  
**20** LRS Career Fair, Monroe Civic Center, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 1-888-300-1320.  
Career Opportunities Fair, Lake Providence HS Gym, 8:30 a.m. to Noon, 1-888-300-1320.  
People First Mtg. – FHF SWLA, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., DeRidder City Police Dept., 1-800-894-6558.  
Standing Up For Ourselves – FHF GNO, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Rosedale Library, Jefferson, 1-800-766-7736.  
**20** Employment Expos to be held throughout LA. Call 504-835-6387 or visit www.lbln.org.  
**21** LA DD Council Mtg, BR, 1-800-450-8108.  
Parenting Children Ages Birth - Five with Special Needs– FHF GNO, LSU/HSC Early Intervention Inst., NO, (504) 942-8308.

BCSS's NOW Workshop – FHF Crossroads, 10 a.m. to Noon, LaSalle Library, Jena, 1-800-259-7200.  
People First Mtg. – FHF SWLA, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Sulphur Library, 1-800-894-6558.  
**23** West Bank Self-Advocates – FHF GNO, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Westwego Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**24** 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Buddy Walk, Noon to 4 p.m., Lake Charles Civic Center, 1-800-894-6558.  
**25** LA Violence Prevention Expo, Heymann Performing Arts Center, Lafayette, 337-237-2090.  
**26** Related Services – FHF GNO, 10 a.m. – Noon, Westwego Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**27** Benefits Planning – Bayou Land FHF, 10 a.m. to Noon, Peltier Lawless Dev. Center, Thibodaux, 1-800-331-5570.  
Assistive Technology Workshop, 10 a.m. - 12 noon, St. Bernard Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**27 – 28** 2nd Annual Conference on Aging and Disability Housing Issues, Alex., LA. Sponsored by LSUHSC HDC. Call Monique Butler at 504-942-8230 or e-mail at mbutl2@lsuhsc.edu.  
**28** Your Comprehensive Plan of Care- FHF SWLA, DHH-BCSS 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., Allen Library, Oberlin, 1-800-894-6558. Stipends available.  
Effective Communication -FHF SWLA, DHH, & BCSS, 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., Allen Library, Oberlin, 1-800-894-6558. Stipends available.  
**29-31** People First of LA Conference, Lafayette, 225-924-5000.

## November

**2** Election Day - Vote!

**3-5** Partnering for a Lifetime of Success, LA Convention Center, Alex. Call Carmen McGhan for more info, 1-800-766-7736.  
**5** Project PROMPT Training, BR, 1-888-300-1320.  
Road to Self Determination – 10 am –1 pm, Baton Rouge General – Mid City Conference Rm. 1, 1-866-216-7474.  
**9** FHF NE LA Cross Training with OCDD, 1-888-300-1320.  
**10** LaSIG Training, Lafayette, 1-888-300-1320.  
LaCAN Kickoff – Holiday Inn, Alex., 1-800-450-8108.  
**11** Special Needs Trust and Estate Planning – FHF GNO, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., FHF Office, Metairie, 1-800-766-7736.  
**13** East Bank Self-Advocates, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., FHF Office, Metairie, 1-800-766-7736.  
**16** Parent to Parent Training – FHF Acadiana, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., FHF Office, Lafayette, 1-800-378-9854.  
**17** Ticket to Work – FHF, 10 a.m. to Noon, Terrebonne Parish Library, Houma, 1-800-331-5570 .  
Benefits Planning – FHF, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Peltier Lawless Dev. Center, Thibodaux, 1-800-331-5570.  
People First Mtg. – FHF, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., DeRidder City Police Dept., 1-800-894-6558.  
With Rights Comes Responsibilities – FHF GNO, 10 a.m. to Noon, Belle Chasse Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**18** People First Mtg – FHF SWLA, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Sulphur Regional Library, 1-800-894-6558.  
**19** State Dept. of Ed. Monitoring – FHF of NE LA Office, Monroe, 1-888-300-1320.

**20** From Bullying to Belonging – FHF GNO, 10 a.m. to Noon, Kenner Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**20** How to Hire and Train Providers; FHF –BR, DHH, BCSS, 9 am – noon, BR General – Bluebonnet, Con. Rm 1, 1-866-216-7474  
**23** West Bank Self-Advocates – FHF GNO, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Westwego Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
**29** IFSP/Transition Training, FHF – NWLA, 10 am-12 noon, Natchitoches Library, 1-888-989-0315.  
**30** LaSIG Training, Lafayette, 1-888-300-1320.

## December

**6 - 7** Mental Health Aspects: Treatment & Support, Columbus Marriott North Hotel, Columbus, Ohio, 1-800-331-5362 or email info@thenadd.org  
**10** Advocacy Center In-Service and Board Mtg., 1-800-960-7705.  
**11** East Bank Self-Advocates – FHF GNO, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., FHF Office, Metairie, 1-800-766-7736.  
**15** People First Mtg – FHF SWLA, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., DeRidder City Police Dept, 1-800-894-6558.  
**18** West Bank Self-Advocates – FHF GNO, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Westwego Library, 1-800-766-7736.  
\* FHF Crossroads will hold LaSIG Family Leadership Academies on Oct. 5, 12, 19, and 26 and Nov. 9 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at FHF, Pineville. Call 1-800-259-7200 for more info.  
\* FHF GNO will begin accepting applications in Nov. 2004 for the 2005 Youth Leadership Forum in BR. Call Twyla McNeely at 1-800-766-7736 for info.

## Safe and Affordable Housing for People with Disabilities

### Knowing Your Rights Is Half the Battle

Finding safe, affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities can be extremely difficult. Further, many people with disabilities are not aware of their rights under the various federal, state and local housing laws. This results in the denial of housing and/or accommodations in housing for many people due to their disability. Laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, and the Louisiana Open Housing Law specifically prohibit such discrimination.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), through a Fair Housing Initiatives Program grant, reached out to assist in the training and education of individuals with disabilities about fair housing rights and issues, how to file complaints when those rights are violated, and who to contact for assistance. Thus, the Louisiana Fair Housing Outreach Project (FHOP) was born.

This joint project of the Advocacy Center, the LSU Human Development Center (HDC) and the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (FHAC) focused on the development of a Train-the-Trainers Model Curriculum to empower, educate and train people with disabilities, their families, and organizations on the housing rights of people with disabilities. Once recruited and trained, they, in turn, were then able to train other individuals on fair housing rights.

The training presentation consisted of several modules covering housing laws, types of discrimination, and the complaint process. The trainings were held in New Orleans and Baton Rouge and were a huge success. If you were not able to attend a training session or if you would like to have a training session presented to your agency or organization, please contact Sharon Hennessey of HDC at (504) 942-8232 or email: shenne@lsuhsc.edu for more information. If you live in the Lake Charles, Houma, or Lafayette areas, look for an announcement about similar training in the months to come.

### Having More Housing Options Is the Other Half

After much effort by the Advocacy Center, New Orleans Legal Assistance Corporation (NOLAC), HDC and FHAC, there will be 100 new housing options for people

with disabilities. At the urging of advocates, Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) agreed to establish a housing preference for people with disabilities under the Section 8 housing program. This means that at least 100 people with disabilities who are currently on the Section 8 housing waiting list will be selected to receive assistance with housing placement. HANO is currently reviewing and updating its Section 8 housing list. If you have questions about HANO's housing preference for people with disabilities, please contact HANO's Director of Section 8 Housing, Selarstean Mitchell, at 670-3300.

Louisiana's Rural Development Office reports that housing funding may be increasing in the area of single family housing. The Advocacy Center, under the research and guidance of staff attorney, Kathy Feldbaum, continues to take a closer look at the availability of affordable and accessible rural housing and its proximity to affordable and accessible transportation, recognizing that individuals with disabilities need housing options that also enable them to be accessible to community and medical services.

A special thanks to Jeffrey May, Jason Weil, Charles Tubre, Laura Tuggle, Nancy Robertson, Sharon Hennessey, Lois Simpson, Rhonda Jackson, and Stacey Seicshnaydre for their assistance on the FHOP program and/or HANO's Section 8 housing preference.

Last but not least, remember, if you have any questions or concerns regarding housing rights of people with disabilities, contact the Fair Housing Action Center. They are here to assist you and they service the entire state of Louisiana. Just remember this motto:

**When in doubt, let FHAC check it out!**  
**1(800) 484-5476, ext. 549**  
**(504) 596-2100**





## Laws & Policies

### 2004 Presidential Elections

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) surveyed both presidential candidates on disability issues. The responses to AAPD's questions from both presidential candidates are on AAPD's website at <http://www.aapd-dc.org/campaign04/indexcampaign>.

### Medicaid Fiscal Relief

At its annual meeting, the National Conference of State Legislatures voted to press Congress to provide a temporary increase in the federal Medicaid assistance percentage (FMAP) for states and to reject proposals to reduce Medicaid spending in the federal FY 2005 budget. "While state fiscal conditions have improved, many states are still struggling to balance their Medicaid budgets," the group said, adding that in the longer term, it supports the development of a formula that would provide additional relief in bad economic times and automatically revert to the normal federal/state cost-sharing when the national economy improves. NCSL is a bipartisan organization serving the state legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, commonwealths and territories.

Bipartisan bills were introduced to provide additional state Medicaid fiscal relief in both the House and Senate. Senators Rockefeller, (D-WV) and Smith, (R-OR) along with Representatives Sherrod Brown, (D-OH) and Peter King (R-NY) introduced legislation just prior to the Congress recessing for August. Both bills provide \$6 billion in fiscal relief over the next year, retroactive to July when the 2003 fiscal relief/increased FMAP expired. There are some differences in how the funds are provided; however, both bills concentrate on providing additional funding through the Medicaid program.

### Teacher Quality Requirements

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report entitled, "Special Education: Additional Assistance and Better Coordination Needed among Education Offices to Help States Meet the NCLBA Teacher Requirements," (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04659.pdf>). The GAO recommends that the Dept. of Education provide more assistance to states and to improve coordination among general and special education programs related to implementation of teacher quality requirements.

### Medicare

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released proposed regulations for the Medicare Modernization Act. During the 60-day public comment period, the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) and other Medicare advocates will develop comments that reflect the disability community's concerns, with particular emphasis on provisions affecting "dual-eligibles." The proposed rule can be accessed online: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/medicarereform>.

### Medicaid/Money Follows the Person

On Tuesday, August 17, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a letter to state Medicaid directors offering guidance on how to provide community-based services using the principles of "money follows the person." Money Follows the Person (MFP) refers to a system of flexible financing for long term services and supports that enables available funds to move with the individual to a community setting of their choice with supports and services of their choosing. The letter to Medicaid directors is intended to clarify issues that have been reported as barriers to providing community-based services. The letter is on the CMS website (<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/states/letters/smd081704.pdf>).

## Louisiana Ombudsman Programs

Imagine living in a nursing home. You are surrounded by staff and other residents, yet you long for someone to talk to. Imagine living in a group home. The convenience of staff often comes before your individual needs and desires. Imagine feeling helpless to ask for something that would improve your day-to-day life. Then, imagine how you would feel when you see the ombudsman, a person who will listen to your needs and desires, who will problem-solve with you and will help you communicate your needs and concerns to staff, administration, and family.

This is the reality experienced by thousands of people with disabilities in Louisiana who live in residential facilities. The Advocacy Center's ombudsman programs are in those facilities to advocate for an improved quality of life for residents and ensure that residents are not free abused, neglected or exploited. Ombudsmen ensure that residents have choices. And, most importantly, they help residents exercise their rights. Here is a small sampling of problems, large and small, solved by Long Term Care (LTC) and Community Living Ombudsmen (CLOP) this summer.

***“Independence is not about having to do everything yourself. It’s about having the resources to make your own decisions on issues, big and small.”***

A LTC Ombudsman helped get a neighbor's TV turned down in the afternoons so that a resident could enjoy peace and quiet in her room during her afternoon nap;

A CLOP Ombudsman arranged for weekend activities that a resident would truly enjoy. He now goes to a movie on Saturday afternoons rather than being loaded into a van and driven around to shopping malls;

A LTC Ombudsman advocated for a resident to be visited by her favorite Aunt despite the disapproval of another family member.

***“A lot of people have gone farther than they thought they could because someone else thought they could.”***

A CLOP Ombudsman assisted a resident in getting into a program that led to a “real job” when the group home staff insisted that the day program that other residents attended was the best place for him;

A LTC Ombudsman helped a resident get permission to participate in a foster grandparent program when the facility physician originally denied approval because of the resident's physical condition.

A CLOP Ombudsman helped a resident successfully communicate his desire and ability to live in a supported living setting when he was offered a waiver.

***“Abused people are afraid things will only get worse if they do try changing things themselves.”***

A CLOP Ombudsman solved a problem of several residents who were over medicated by advocating to the administration to call in a physician to conduct a long overdue medicine review;

A LTC Ombudsman insisted that a facility address a resident's complaint of persistent pain (the nurse implied that it was simply a cry for attention) and to call in the physician immediately;

A CLOP Ombudsman worked with a group home staff to ensure the safety of other residents until an inappropriately placed resident who was physically aggressive could be transferred to a more appropriate setting;

A CLOP Ombudsman worked with a family member and Health Standards when residents feared retaliation by a staff member if they complained about the home.

\* \* \*

Just imagine if there were no Ombudsmen in facilities across Louisiana.



## THE DISABILITY ALL STARS



Javier Zapata



Stella Guidroz



Nell Bush



Sharyn Scheyd



Mattie Wilson



Elizabeth Boutte

The TriAngle is honored to present members of the Advocacy Center Board of Directors as this issue's Disability All Stars:

Mr. Joel Mendler, New Orleans, President, is a partner with the law firm of Baldwin & Haspel where he specializes in taxation and trust & estate planning. Joel has extensive experience in representing seniors concerned about retirement, estate planning and long-term care needs, as well as families with children with disabilities.



Leroy Vincent

Ms. Freddie Pincus, New Orleans, Vice President, worked as a speech therapist with children with disabilities for thirty-three years before retiring and becoming an advocate for seniors, especially seniors in nursing homes.

Ms. Sharyn Scheyd, Kenner, Secretary, is the mother of three children, one of whom has a disability. Sharyn has been an active advocate for people with disabilities for over twenty years. She currently directs Partners in Policymaking for the DD Council and also directs the Home of Your Own Project for Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority.



Joel Mendler

Mr. Javier Zapata, Covington, Treasurer, and his wife, Derlene, are associate pastors of the Springs of Life Christian Fellowship. After an accident, which left him with a disability, Javier has devoted himself to the rights of persons with disabilities.

Ms. Debbie Prockner, Denham Springs, President Elect, is the parent of three children, one of whom has a developmental disability. She is also the Director of Families Helping Families of Greater Baton Rouge and involved in multiple aspects of advocacy for persons with disabilities in Louisiana.



Olgarita Lee

Ms. Elizabeth Boutte, New Iberia, and her family have coped with mental illness for years. She is a strong advocate and was especially active during last year's legislative session. She is also a Former Chair of the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Board.

Mrs. Nell Bush, Monroe is the Former Chair of the PAIMI Advisory Board. She is also a founding member of Bridges of Monroe.

Mr. Michael Crochet, Lafayette, is a retired partner of a large accounting firm in Lafayette. He now devotes himself to other business interests and volunteer work.



Freddie Pincus

Ms. Stella Guidroz, Hammond, is retired from state service where she specialized in disability policy. She remains active in the disability arena via her consulting firm which assists providers to develop Quality Improvement Plans.

Ms. Tammy LeBlanc, New Iberia, is the mother of 2 children, including her daughter who has a physical disability. She is also the Assistant Executive Director of the Arc of New Iberia.

Ms. Olgarita Lee, New Orleans, is the mother of three children, one of whom has a developmental disability. She is an activist who, with her husband, somehow finds the time to home school her children.

Mr. David LeGendre, Baton Rouge, has worked in the disability field for over twenty years in developmental disabilities and is currently a benefits specialist with LSU/HSC - Human Development Center.



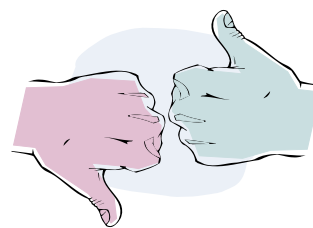
Debbie Prockner

Mr. Denver Nobles, Scott, is the current Chair of the PAIMI Advisory Board, a board member of State Independent Living Council (SILC), and a Management Team Member of Meaningful Minds, a statewide mental health consumer initiative. He is also a Bridges Trainee, Educator and Facilitator.

(continued on page 15)

## Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down

The Advocacy Center wishes to thank the many individuals and groups who sent letters to Governor Blanco on behalf of the Advocacy Center and its clients. More than 500 letters were sent. They relayed the message to the Governor that: (1) the AC has been doing good work through the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, the Ombudsman Legal Assistance Program, and the Community Living Ombudsman Program; and (2) the Advocacy Center should be allowed to continue to do that work. The support shown by the disability community in the face of the Governor's review of AC contracts was overwhelming and humbling. It makes us at the Advocacy Center more resolved than ever to work as hard as we can to attain the rights of persons with disabilities in Louisiana.



Children living in nursing homes? This can't be, right? Wrong. The Advocacy Center has learned that children are being housed in a nursing home in Minden, Louisiana. Their ages range from 5 months to 17 years. At least four other nursing homes in Louisiana also house children. AC, in concert with OCDD and others, will be working to find these children a more appropriate placement.



The Advocacy Center wishes to acknowledge the generosity of our sister agencies, the DD Council and the Human Development Center, for suggesting that we devote this issue of the TriAngle to AC and its services. We have tried to convey a feel for the type of work we do. However, the issues we address on behalf of the 3,000 individuals who call us each year are so varied that we have presented only a sampling of what we do. We invite you to visit our website ([www.advocacyla.org](http://www.advocacyla.org)) or give us a call for more information.

*(continued from page 14)*

Dr. Lisa L. Persinger, New Orleans, is a school psychologist specializing in disability. She currently works for the Human Development Center as an Assistant Professor and Information Coordinator for the National Center on Special Education Accountability Monitoring.

Ms. Mary Ann McGrath Swaim, New Orleans, is the wife of a person with a disability. She is a lawyer who is currently back in school studying counseling.

Mr. Leroy Vincent, New Orleans, has been an advocate for years, having served on the DD Council and is a person with a disability. He is President of Board of Directors for Neighborhood Housing Services of N.O. Inc.

Ms. Tracie Wells, Shreveport is a teacher of special education in the Caddo Parish School System, She is also a mother and is an active volunteer in the Shreveport community.

Ms. Mattie Wilson, Shreveport, has had a disability since she was in an accident 19 years ago. In addition to her work on the AC board, she has a Masters in Social Work plus 30 hours towards her Doctorate Degree.

### Tired of Waiting?

If you or someone you know has a disability and is waiting for services...

**WE WANT TO KNOW!**

Call the Disability Information Access Line at

1-800-922-3425

or

1-800-450-8108

It's easy to ignore lists, but hard to ignore people. Help us "PUT A FACE" on the waiver waiting list.

**MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT!**

## Moving Along: Advocacy Center Expanding Efforts to Improve Public Transportation

Transportation is an essential service. The lack of reliable accessible transportation impacts all areas of life for persons with disabilities. For over fifteen years, the Advocacy Center has been working to improve accessible public transportation for residents of Louisiana with disabilities. Those efforts are continuing, and several new initiatives are planned for the coming year.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 required that public transit agencies improve the accessibility of their regular (fixed route) services, and maintain complementary paratransit services for persons with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed route systems. Many of these requirements were phased in over several years. At this point, all public transportation systems should be in compliance with the ADA. In Louisiana, many are still falling short.

In **New Orleans**, AC continues to monitor RTA compliance with the ADA and a 1996 Consent Decree. Last year, RTA finally met the required service standards for complementary paratransit services. AC is continuing to seek improvements in fixed route (regular bus) services. Particular issues of concern are inaccessible bus stops, failure to properly secure wheelchairs, and general customer courtesy and safety issues.

In **Shreveport**, AC has been successful in getting the transit agency to address clients' paratransit and fixed route service concerns. Paratransit hours were extended, denial rates have decreased, and bus stop access issues are being addressed.

In **Baton Rouge**, AC has investigated problems with paratransit and fixed route services over the past several years. It recently met with CTC officials to discuss concerns and possible

solutions. A new paratransit provider has been put in place, and the number of vehicles may be increased. A major fixed route issue is the lack of driver training on use of lifts. In the coming year, AC plans to actively pursue remedies for the problems that have been uncovered.

In **Lake Charles**, AC has also begun an investigation into complaints and concerns, and will seek system-wide improvements in the coming year.

AC has also assisted a number of individual clients in understanding their rights to accessible public transportation, and has communicated concerns to transit agencies.

Individuals who have questions or concerns regarding public transportation are encouraged to contact the Advocacy Center for more information.



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