



# VOICES & VISIONS

A VOICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PROMISING VISION FOR TOMORROW

## Community Opportunities: Exciting Outcomes

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In last February's *Voices & Visions*, the Board briefly described a new collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) to improve the capacity of organizations supporting community living opportunities for individuals with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. Community Opportunities, a creative partnership involving Wall Residencies, Central Virginia Training Center (CVTC), and New River Valley Community Services, received the first grant under this initiative.

Their project is moving forward and the Board is excited to report that much is being achieved. Working with individuals living in institutions or at risk for institutionalization, who have the dream and potential to live in communities of their own choice, the participating agencies are learning more about how to provide the personalized supports necessary to make that possible.

One of the individuals who has expressed interest in community living is a woman in her late thirties with cortical blindness and mental retardation who has lived at CVTC since she was very young. Since the age of 12 or 13, her vision has gradually declined, and now, she sees only light and shadows. However, staff at CVTC who know her well report that she has adapted effectively and compensates for her visual impairment. She is gregarious and out-going, with a good sense of humor, and handles basic personal tasks with limited support or assistance. She enjoys neck massages, listening to music

and having someone sit with her and sing, bus and train rides, and outdoor activities-especially picnics.

As a part of the Community Opportunities project, a "microboard" is being developed for this woman. Staff from both the microboard and CVTC are examining her decision making capacity and exploring possible guardianship or authorized representative options that may be needed. The microboard will serve as a support structure to increase her opportunities for self-determination and to maximize the use of natural supports and other resources that will enable her to realize her community living plan and secure a future outside of an institution.

Similar strategies will be employed for other current residents of CVTC wishing to move into the community, as well as persons receiving support through Wall Residencies who are at risk of institutionalization due to a lack of natural supports and the occurrence of extremely challenging behavior, and other residents of the New River Valley who are living without

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## Letter from the Executive Director

Heidi Lawyer



There continue to be new and exciting challenges for Virginia's Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council. The winter months were very busy. The General Assembly addressed many important issues, and the Board was directly involved with two legislative activities. The Board also closely monitored all disability related legislation, and this issue of *Voices & Visions* contains information on how to access a summary of key items passed as well as how citizens can track legislation themselves.

Much of the Board's legislative attention focused on the restructuring Virginia's mental health and mental retardation service system. The proposed infusion of additional money for community based services was welcomed and appreciated; however, the Board was unable to support the restructuring plan as a whole. Board Chair Sandy Hermann presented compelling testimony to the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Resources expressing the Board's opposition to the proposed rebuilding of the Central and Southeastern Virginia Training Centers. She emphasized the need to refocus the Commonwealth's resources on building community based infrastruc-

ture and supports, not institutions.

Legislative testimony is an important tool for advocates, regardless of which side of an issue they support. Concise, factual, well-developed testimony can make a difference. On April 8, participants in the Board's Partners in Policymaking (PIP) program presented testimony before a mock legislative committee in House Room D at the General Assembly. This year's participation by General Assembly members was the highest ever. Delegate O'Bannon, a faithful participant in this important exercise each year, served as the Committee Chair. We were also honored to welcome Delegate Bulova, Senator Lambert, and Senator Stosch's two legislative aides, Karla Boughey and David Brat. The Board greatly appreciates their taking time on a Saturday to educate and listen to our Partners.

Many PIP participants are parents of young children with disabilities, and as such, a great deal of this

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Reaching Out: Guardianship & Elder Rights Conference

Katherine Lawson

Hundreds of lawyers, social workers, support providers, public administrators, behavioral health representatives, and others gathered in Williamsburg on April 3 & 4 for the annual joint conference of the Virginia Guardianship Association (VGA) and Virginia Elder Rights Coalition (VERC). Board sponsorship of the conference supported five workshops featuring new information on Medicaid Waivers, person-centered planning, consumer choice, and other areas where the Board is making important investments through its grants and special projects.



In his compelling presentation "Guardianship, when it works and when it doesn't", Steve Waldron detailed his story of getting to know "W", sharing information on self-determination that was unfamiliar to many in his audience. Mr. Waldron met "W" through his network at Central Virginia Training Center (CVTC), and the guardianship relationship that grew from their friendship enabled "W" to move successfully from CVTC to the community. Later in the conference, during her workshop on Positive Behavioral Supports, Paula Traverse Carlton passionately described self-determination and support for community living options as a civil rights movement.

Executive Director of VGA, Joy Duke, praised the Board for its role in helping to plan and sponsor the conference and for broadening the horizons of her organization to include a wider range of individuals working with the disabilities community. Working together with the VGA and VERC, the Board is building relationships that are positively impacting public guardianship programs and community living alternatives for both older Virginians and those with disabilities. **VV**

## DD Network Update

Colleen Miller

Many people with disabilities rely on the Medicaid program for medical care and for supports and services to be able to live in the most integrated environment possible. In fall 2005, Congress passed sweeping changes to the Medicaid program. Although the changes are very complex, states are not required to adopt them all. States develop a "state Medicaid plan" and, under the new law, that plan can include or not include certain changes.

Some of the changes are not optional. For example, all applicants must prove that they are citizens or legal residents. This will pose a challenge for some, particularly for those who no longer have their birth certificate or those who have lost the necessary paperwork.

However, many changes are optional. For example, states can increase the amount of money that a participant must pay to receive a service, also known as a co-payment. For many people, any increase in the co-payment could make the service impossible to afford. Under the new law, state Medicaid plans can impose greater limits on the list of preferred prescription drugs. This requirement could mean that people who use newer or more expensive medications to manage their disabilities may no longer have access to them. The state Medicaid plan also can be changed to force people to make a higher payment if they use the emergency room for services that could be provided elsewhere. For people with disabilities who move frequently from one community to another, or who otherwise do not have a regular primary care doctor, the emergency room is often the only place where an individual knows for certain that he or she can receive services.

Virginia stands at a crossroads. We can adopt a state Medicaid plan that will continue to afford people with disabilities the opportunity to live safely in integrated environments, or we can adopt a plan that harms their ability to survive at all. It will be up to the advocacy community to influence our state policy makers as to the desirable choice for all Virginians. ♡

*The DD Network Partner agencies include: the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (Heidi Lawyer, Director), Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, (Colleen Miller, Director), Partnership for People with Disabilities (Fred Orelove, Director).*

## General Assembly Update

Each year, the Board and its partners carefully track activity by the General Assembly that will have an impact on Virginians with disabilities and the state's disability services system. As always, the 2006 session of the legislature was a busy one featuring several important changes to state law, major budgetary considerations, and joint resolutions of the House of Delegates and the Senate. A summary of fourteen key measures passed by this year's General Assembly, prepared by Brandon Leonard, Policy and Planning Specialist at the Virginia Office of Community Integration for People with Disabilities, may be found on the Board's website under Policy & Legislation.

Included on that list is Senate Bill 182 that establishes a new Community Integration Advisory Commission. The Commission replaces the current Oversight Advisory Board authorized by Executive Orders of Governors Kaine and Warner. Working with the state's Community Integration Implementation Team, of which the Board is a member, the Commission will monitor and guide Virginia's progress in meeting its obligations under the U.S. Supreme Court's 1999 Olmstead decision, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Virginians with Disabilities Act.

Citizens can also directly track legislation themselves by entering a bill number or key words in a special search engine on the General Assembly's website at <http://legis.state.va.us/>. The Virginia Legislative Information System offers an even more powerful tool for monitoring multiple bills called "Lobbyist-in-a-Box". Additional information on that system and a helpful tutorial on how to use it can be found at <http://leg1.state.va.us/h015.htm>. Up to five bills can be

tracked at no charge with additional tracking services and e-mail notifications of legislative actions available for a fee. ♡

### Next Board Meeting

June 15, 2006  
Wyndham Richmond  
Airport Hotel  
4700 S. Laburnum Ave.  
Richmond, VA

Upcoming Meetings:  
September 13, 2006  
December 8, 2006

## Partners in Policymaking Update

Teri Barker-Morgan



On May 20, the Board celebrates the graduation of the Partners in Policymaking (PIP) Class of 2006. During the course of their eight month training, each class develops a unique character. Participants discover their individual advocacy strengths and passions while simultaneously learning the importance of working together for a common goal. The Class of 2006 is resilient, determined, and creative.

Virginia's Partners graduates have an impressive history of moving the system forward, challenging the status quo, and educating those around them-sometimes in subtle or direct ways. Expectations of the program are made clear to each participant from day one. Partners are expected to use what they learn, share their information and resources, and educate their schools, communities, and policymakers. The Board invests generously in each Partner, and Partners continue to provide a return on that investment.



During the April PIP session, Partners traveled to the General Assembly Building to practice delivering testimony at a mock committee hearing. Afterwards, in the House Chamber, they debated a bill and cast their vote just as their representatives in the General Assembly do each session. The experience was both empowering and enlightening. Change can and does happen through the advocacy and involve-



ment of citizens communicating with legislators and community leaders. Without the active participation of citizens who vote, voice their concerns, and share their ideas, where would we be?

The Class of 2006 is poised to follow in the footsteps of the more than 250 Virginia Partners graduates who have come before them, moving the system forward and spreading the culture and value of inclusion in communities throughout Virginia. ♡

### Congratulations, Partners In Policymaking Class of 2006!

## YLF Update

Teri Barker-Morgan



At the Virginia Transition Forum held in Roanoke last March, two alumni of the Board's Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) had an opportunity to put their leadership and advocacy skills to work. Stephen Joseph, a 2003 YLF delegate from Lynchburg, and Christopher Rudder, a 2004 YLF delegate from Newport News, provided conference attendees with first-hand information on the experiences, ideas, and concerns of high school students related to improving transition planning and supports in secondary education.

Christopher and Stephen responded to numerous questions from a standing-room-only audience of Forum attendees. They also distributed an informative bookmark featuring recommendations for educa-

tors, transition services providers, and parents on how to best support and include students in the transition planning process. The "Top Ten List of Transition Do's and Don'ts" bookmark and the information it contains were developed during discussions among YLF alumni on how they could take a leadership role in improving the quality and availability of transition services for students disabilities who are in high school now.

The 2006 Youth Leadership Forum will take place from July 10-14 at Christopher Newport University. Twenty-five rising high school juniors and seniors from across Virginia will be selected to participate. Visit the Board's website in mid-May for the announcement of this summer's YLF delegates. ♡

## Biennial Assessment Now Available

Tom Driscoll

After a careful and thorough research and development process spanning over two years, the Board approved distribution of the final draft of its 2006 Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia at its March meeting. In early May, the Governor, members of his cabinet, and the General Assembly received copies of the report. Distribution to state and local boards and agencies, professional and advocacy organizations, and other stakeholders statewide is underway. The Biennial Assessment is also available on the Board's website and in CD-ROM, audio, and other accessible formats on request.

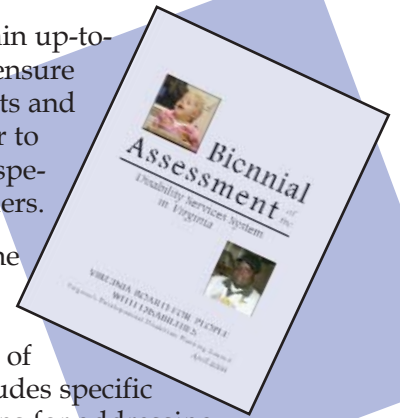
As reported in the February *Voices & Visions*, the 2006 Biennial Assessment expands and improves on the interim Biennial Report released in March 2005. Feedback solicited from providers and consumers of disability services, decision-makers, and advocates across the state identified inaccurate and incomplete information in the interim report. It also recommended broadening the topics covered and making the report more reader-friendly and person-centered.

In response, the Biennial Assessment was completely redrafted and up-dated. The interim report emphasized community and institutional supports, early intervention, education, and rehabilitation services and was organized around the state's agency structure. In the final report, coverage of those topics was expanded and reorganized, plus additional information was added on healthcare, housing, transportation, employment, and advocacy services. Chapters now focus on basic service categories across the lifespan, bring together programs from a wider range of sources, and make it easier to see the full range of available services as well as gaps in the system. Additional state agencies and other sources

were consulted to obtain up-to-date information and ensure accuracy. Resource lists and an index make it easier to locate information on specific services or providers.

As reflected by its name change, the revised Biennial Assessment also expands coverage of critical issues and includes specific Board recommendations for addressing them. The Board reviewed critical issues listed in the interim report that were identified primarily by partner agencies and advocacy organizations. It considered feedback from its own public comment opportunities and similar public forums in which it participated. Drawing on these sources, as well as its own knowledge and experiences, the Board identified more than eighty critical issues facing Virginia's disability services system and makes fifty-four recommendations addressing those concerns. The Biennial Assessment's newly added executive summary introduces and summarizes these issues and recommendations.

The Biennial Assessment has already guided the development of the Board's new state agency strategic plan and its proposed federal 2007-2011 State Plan. For the next two years, it will provide a foundation for the Board's involvement in policymaking and other activities that seek to expand and improve the disability services system and broaden opportunities for independence, self-determination, and community inclusion for Virginians with disabilities. **VV**



### Community Opportunities: Exciting Outcomes (continued from page 1)



supports and are at the risk of institutionalization. The lessons learned with each person moving into the community will guide and expedite expanded community living options and consumer direction of services for other individuals previously prevented from moving into the community because of a lack of supports.

This project and the knowledge and experience gained by the members of the Community Opportunities partnership should make it possible for DMHMRSAS and others to replicate its successes statewide. Through

greater use of both traditional and non-traditional partnerships and resources, including microboards and public guardianship, the young woman described above and the other participants in this project will be just the first of many individuals with disabilities who will be able to realize their dreams of self-determination and community living. **VV**

## VCU-RRTC Grants Produce Successful Employment Collaborations

Lynne Talley

Recognizing the need for innovative solutions to improve access to meaningful employment for adults with disabilities, the Board has identified staffing agencies as an underutilized resource. In 2004, the Board awarded a grant to Virginia Commonwealth University's Research Rehabilitation Training Center (VCU-RRTC) to replicate an earlier, successful Richmond area project in the Roanoke Valley. As before, RRTC's objectives were to change attitudes and build relationships between the staffing industry and Employment Service Organizations (ESOs) resulting in more long-term employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. A staffing specialist hired by RRTC provided awareness training to the ESOs and staffing agencies, assisted with communications issues, and consulted on accommodation needs while building trust among the project's participants.

Between July 2004 and December 2005, the RRTC project generated referrals from three ESOs and nine vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors at the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) and the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). As a result, 21 individuals found employment in production, inventory, administrative, and clerical positions. At the end of the project, a majority of those individuals remained employed in their original jobs or advanced to new jobs with higher wages.

Sometimes, a simple accommodation, achieved through collaboration, made a job placement a success. One jobseeker referred by an ESO and DRS was quickly matched with a position at a local production company by a staffing agency, but as a job coach assisted in his orientation, a major barrier emerged. Could he navigate the production floor safely in his wheelchair? Would other employees operating forklifts be able to see him? At the staffing company's suggestion, a tall, inexpensive, bright red flag was attached to his wheelchair. The problem was solved, and he has become a valued and productive employee.

Funding for the Roanoke project has ended, but as with the earlier Richmond initiative, referrals continue to flow from ESOs and VR counselors to the participating staffing agencies and others, and all parties involved express the desire to further strengthen their relationships. In the words of one

staffing agency participant: "There are still a lot of boundaries that block individuals with disabilities from employment. Through...this program, I have developed better relationships with the rehabilitation community and other agencies. I hope to continue to build the stepping stones to better awareness in the community and better education of our customers to make employment for these individuals a successful transition."

Similarly, ESOs and VR counselors report that the project "opened doors to some companies...that would not normally be open to us." They discovered a willingness by staffing agencies to work with supported employment vendors and provide job accommodations.

As these comments indicate, creating person-to-person relationships between individuals at the staffing agencies and the ESOs and VR agencies was the most important and lasting outcome of the RRTC projects. Regular and frequent communication leading to an open and honest exchange of ideas produced successful and lasting partnerships that expanded job opportunities for people with disabilities. ♪



### NEW FELLOW!

The Board is pleased to announce selection of the 2006-07 Disability Policy Fellow – Margaret (Meg) Hardt. Ms. Hardt currently is pursuing a second Masters degree (and a second career) in Rehabilitative Counseling at VCU. ♪

## Hail & Farewell to Policy Fellow Shannon Hamm

Last summer, 2005-2006 Policy Fellow Shannon Hamm began her work with the Board by gathering information to update the report "People with Disabilities in Virginia: Facts and Estimates," created by 2001-2002 Policy Fellow Ellen Jackson. Using the results of her research and graphics support from staff member Karen Lindley, Shannon created a concise set of informative, eye-catching, and colorful documents. Early this year, these "Disability Fast Facts" on education, employment, community participation, and technology were distributed to the Board and posted on the Board's website along with well-documented tables showing the latest disability prevalence estimates for Virginia and the U.S. Since then, staff have found them extremely useful in responding to inquiries from constituents.

During the summer, Shannon also studied Virginia's Olmstead Initiative and interviewed Julie Stanley, Director of Virginia's Office of Community Integration. A brief summary of that interview appeared in the August 2005 *Voices & Visions*.

In the fall, Shannon began work on a project that has just culminated in letters from the Board to each member of the General Assembly containing estimates of

the number of their constituents likely to have disabilities, information relevant to their support of expanded community-based services in their districts. The letters also call attention to the Board as a key source for information—as exemplified by Shannon's research and the recently released Biennial Assessment—and guidance on important disability issues before the legislators.

Shannon is currently wrapping up her projects, composing a more detailed summary of her research methodology and key findings, and preparing a brief presentation for the Board's June quarterly meeting. She will also graduate from Virginia Commonwealth University this May with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling.

Reflecting on what she has learned in her year with the Board, Shannon believes she has a much broader and deeper understand-

ing of the array of services available to Virginians with disabilities and of the needs still to be met. As an aspiring service provider, she is also more cognizant of the importance of including people with disabilities in all aspects of public policy.

The Board wishes Shannon the best on her graduation and much success in her career. **VV**



2005 - 2006 Policy Fellow,  
Shannon Hamm

### Letter from the Director *(continued from page 2)*

year's testimony reflected concerns with the education system. Related testimony covered the need for additional training of both regular and special education school staff, limited availability of preparation programs for teachers of students with vision impairments, public school accessibility, the value of early intervention programs for young children with autism; high speech language pathology caseloads, and bullying of students with disabilities. Other Partners' testimony addressed long Medicaid Waiver waiting lists, improved agency staff training, low provider reimbursement rates, Virginia's low personal maintenance allowance, the lack of available and accessible transportation—particularly after 5pm - and the inability of young people in nursing homes to obtain community based services. The Board addresses all of these issues through its policy, outreach, and grant work, and it was encouraging to see that the Partners' testimony was well received by the legislators and aides on the panel, who responded with many questions and valuable advice.

The issues brought forth by the Partners were also highly consistent with those identified through the Board's Spring 2005 statewide public forums and included in its recently released 2006 Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia. Earlier this month, the Biennial Assessment was distributed to the Governor, Cabinet Members, Agency Directors, and members of the General Assembly. In the coming months, we look forward to their response to the Board's recommendations and to continuing our work to educate, inform, and influence policy, practice, and resource allocation so that Virginians with disabilities can be a part of our community in ways that are truly meaningful. **VV**



# Meetings & Events of Interest



## Advisory Committee, Virginia Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program

June 9, 2006 10:00 AM

Department of Health  
Offices of the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association,  
4200 Innslake Dr., Glen Allen, VA.  
Pat T. Dewey (866) 493-1090 or pat.dewey@vdh.virginia.gov

## Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

June 10, 2006 10:00 AM

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired  
Administrative Hqtrs, 397 Azalea Ave., Richmond, VA 23227  
Susan Payne (800) 622-2155 or susan.payne@dbvi.virginia.gov

## Medicaid Transportation Advisory Committee

June 21, 2006 1:00 PM

Department of Medical Assistance Services  
600 E. Broad Street, 13th Floor Board Room, Richmond, VA 23219  
Bob Knox (804) 371-8854 or robert.knox@dmas.virginia.gov

## Virginia Public Guardian & Conservator Advisory Board

June 22, 2006 10:00 AM

Virginia Public Guardian and Conservator Advisory Board  
Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100,  
Richmond, VA 23229.  
Janet Dingle Brown, Esq. (800) 552-3402 or  
janet.brown@vda.virginia.gov

## Virginia Mental Health Planning Council

June 28, 2006 10:00 AM

Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation & Substance  
Abuse Services  
Department of Rehabilitation Services, 8004 Franklin Farms Drive,  
Richmond, VA 23229  
Will Ferriss, LCSW (804) 371-0363 or  
will.ferriss@co.dmhmrsas.virginia.gov

## Long-Term Care Administrators Board Meeting

July 11, 2006 9:30 AM

Board of Long-Term Care Administrators  
6603 W. Broad Street, 5th Floor Richmond, Virginia 23230  
Sandra Reen (804) 662-7457 or sandra.reen@dhp.virginia.gov

## Disabilities Advisory Council

July 12, 2006 10:00 AM

Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy  
Byrd Building, 1910 Byrd Ave., Suite 5, Richmond, Virginia 23230  
Lisa Shehi (800) 552-3962 or lisa.shehi@vopa.virginia.gov

## First Annual Statewide VA INFO Conference: "Strong Roots for a Healthy Future"

July 28 - 29, 2006 Noon on Friday thru 4:00 PM Saturday  
Omni Charlottesville Hotel, Charlottesville, VA. www.va-info.org

## 2006 Governor's Housing Conference

November 28 - December 1, 2006

Norfolk Waterside Marriott, Norfolk, VA. www.dhcd.virginia.gov

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VIRGINIA BOARD FOR  
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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