



Gearing Up For Your Transitions

GACEC Advocacy Projects

Delaware Disability History and Awareness Month

House Bill (HB) 123 was signed into law on August 17, 2011 making October “Disability History and Awareness Month. Members of the GACEC and GACEC staff developed a multi-pronged approach to increasing awareness and providing information and materials to keep this bill from being one that only sits on a shelf.

The **Disability History and Awareness Month Poster Contest** became the second part of the effort to promote Disability History and Awareness Month. The Poster Contest ends with the Disability History and Awareness Month Poster Contest Luncheon. The winning students are joined by their families, teachers and school principals and treated to an awards ceremony and lunch with Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn. The number of entries continues to grow each year.

School video for Disability History and Awareness Month

A third prong of the promotional efforts for Disability History and Awareness Month has been the production and distribution of a video regarding Disability History and Awareness to all Delaware school districts and charter schools. Numerous individuals in the community were asked to share their stories of overcoming obstacles as individuals with special needs. The video features the personal experiences of individuals with disabilities including Down Syndrome, Deafness, Cerebral Palsy, Autism and Juvenile Diabetes. Copies of the video were distributed around the State and have been well received by educators who have used them in conjunction with curriculum to improve awareness in their classrooms.

On June 27, 2012, the Delaware Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) No. 34, establishing the **State Transition Task Force for Emerging Adults with Disabilities and Special Health Care Needs**. The State Transition Task Force for Emerging Adults with Disabilities and Special Health Care Needs is an initiative established by the Governor’s Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC), the University of Delaware (UD) Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS), and the Catalyst Center, Boston University School of Public Health. The Task Force studied the transitional needs of young adults with disabilities and special health care needs. The Task Force’s main goal was to develop strategies to ensure successful transition from the educational system into adult services. The Taskforce Report has led to a number of recommendations. Some of those recommendations are already being acted upon, such as the development of a Transition website.

Heart 2 Heart Hugs

As part of our advocacy work to improve the lives of people with exceptionalities in Delaware, the GACEC worked with a stakeholder group and community organizations from around the State to collect sleeping bags for children in homeless shelters and foster care. The McKinney-Vento Act provides services for children who are poorly housed but there continues to be unmet needs that lead to the creation of the Sleeping Bag Campaign. The Campaign was promoted by local media outlets and community organizations. Organizations such as the Delaware Food Bank, WSFS Bank and TLK Child Care Centers served as drop off locations for new sleeping bags that were collected. The Camden Super Wal-Mart provided a discount for individuals who purchased sleeping bags for the Campaign in all, over 1200 bags were collected and distributed. Other groups have joined the Campaign begun by the GACEC and it has now been expanded to provide warmth, comfort, hugs and smiles for children and young adults in Delaware who are homeless or in foster care through a new Campaign called Heart2Heart Hugs. Donations of “hugs” (new or newly made coats, blankets, scarves, gloves, fleece items, and more) poured in from the generous citizens of Delaware. The GACEC in partnership with the Organization of Adult Alumni and Students in Service (OAASIS) hosted a reception in the lobby at Massey Station where “Hug Ambassadors” (social workers, school nurses, foster care coordinators) were free to pick from the thousands of donated items. The items give a sense of ownership to children who have very little they can call their own. The items also provide warmth and stability as many of the children live in situations where sleeping arrangements may be unknown and minimal most of the time. Council is very proud of its efforts on behalf of the homeless children and foster care children in Delaware.

GACEC Disability Education & Awareness Program (DEAP)

Over the past three years GACEC staff has worked diligently to implement new and exciting programs to promote disability awareness. In that time we were able to reach over 4000 individuals both with and without disabilities. Our largest performance to date was the 2012 Delaware State Fair performance during Healthy Kids Day. The new **Disability Education & Awareness Program (DEAP)** includes our famous Kids on the Block puppets, and incorporates new characters using a book that was written with the help of community members, educators, administrators, and Executive Director Wendy Strauss. The book will be used in the program geared toward early childhood audiences, and is titled All My Different Friends at School. The book was completed with help from a student at Poly-Tech High School who did illustrations and students at DelCastle High School who printed copies of the book for us. Those same students helped design, illustrate and print a coloring book for oral health month based on the characters from the All My Different Friends at School book. That program was taken to local early childhood centers where nearly 200 students participated. This Fall DEAP went to high school! The pilot program involved students from the High School learning about a specific disability, and using that information as they perform skits for the elementary aged students in their district. The goal of this program is to give the

students ownership, allowing them to truly embrace disability awareness in a way that they may have never done in the past.

Advocating on a National Level

A Group of Disability Advocates, including GACEC Executive Director Wendy Strauss and Chair Terri Hancharick, met with legislative aides from our Congressional Delegation. Representatives from Senator Coons, Senator Carper and Congressman Carney graciously met with the delegation to share opinions, and express concerns or support for bills at the national level that impact individuals with disabilities and their families.

Legislation

The GACEC sometimes takes the lead in developing legislation that will have positive effects on this population and individuals with disabilities. The Council took the lead on Senate Bill No. 100 which addresses the lack of standards and the misuse of seclusion and restraint in Delaware public schools. This signed legislation keeps our kids safer as they learn, develop and participate in instructional programs that promote academic achievement. Students and adults in schools, community or institutional settings have died from the use of restraint and seclusion. Often, these deaths result from the misuse or overuse of restraint and seclusion techniques. The GACEC along with representatives from other Councils spends many hours at Legislative Hall educating our state leaders.

The GACEC formed a diverse stakeholder group to research and assist with writing regulations to implement “Needs Based Funding” in all Delaware schools. The committee’s intent was to ensure fair distribution of funding for children with disabilities in Delaware. Joining the GACEC at the table were representatives from DOE, Autism Delaware, Statewide Programs for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind/Delaware School for the Deaf (DSD), Delaware Autism Program (DAP), Parent Information Center (PIC), Disabilities Law Program (DLP), Special Education Leadership, DDC, SCPD and many community members. The resulting legislation HB 1, was signed by Governor Jack Markell February 17, 2011.

In 2009, GACEC Executive Director Wendy Strauss approached Senator Bethany Hall-Long and Representative Quinton Johnson about recognizing the month of October as Disability History and Awareness Month in Delaware schools. The result was House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 19. In 2010, the resolution was upgraded to a bill. House Bill (HB) 123 was signed into law on August 17, 2011.

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University School of Public Health. The Task Force studied the transitional needs of young adults with disabilities and special health care needs. The Task Force's main goal was to develop strategies to ensure successful transition from the educational system into adult services. The Taskforce Report has led to a number of recommendations and actions.

As legislation is introduced and regulations change, GACEC is constantly reviewing these items and commenting when appropriate. Comments can range from support to sharing concerns about the impact the proposed legislation may have on council's constituents.

Here you will find a history of [legislation introduced, commented on, or reviewed by GACEC](#).

For questions regarding legislation going back prior to 2011, please feel free to contact the GACEC office directly at (302) 739 –4553.