Project Bridge is the periodic newsletter of the Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) within the University of Delaware’s College of Education and Human Development. This issue includes updates from the past few months and a look forward to upcoming events.

Please send news and items for the next issue to Ben Szmidt at bszmidt@udel.edu by May 15.

IN THE NEWS

UDaily highlights assistive technology

The Delaware Assistive Technology Initiative’s (DATI) resource centers were the subject of a recent article featured in UDaily, which highlighted how both professionals and members of the public can access the centers to find the AT they or their clients need, take part in equipment demonstrations, and consult with AT specialists. The centers will be the focus of an upcoming Lunchtime Learning session hosted by CDS on May 3. CDS administers the centers, which are located in New Castle, Kent and Sussex counties. The centers house more than 1,900 unique items of assistive technology, from laptops to elastic shoelaces, that members of the public can try out for free. Delaware residency is the only eligibility requirement for borrowing equipment, and customers can learn from center staff about financial aid options should they wish to purchase the AT they sample. Registration for the Lunchtime Learning session is currently full. To put your name on a waitlist and to find out about upcoming AT-related events, contact Kristen Fraley at kfraley@udel.edu or 302-831-3632.
CDS notified of award to fund home modifications throughout state

CDS, in partnership with the Division of Services for Aging and Adults with Physical Disabilities (DSAAPD), will soon be able to fund home modifications for individuals with paralysis-causing conditions and their caregivers, thanks to a $75,000 grant award from the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. The award will make possible the installation of ramps, lifts, and automation tools in the homes of Delawareans who qualify for the program. CDS and DSAAPD will promote eligibility criteria after the award is in hand.

fabricATing solutions at UD for the home

More than 80 community members learned how to quickly and easily construct assistive technology, including iPad stands, adapted art tools, and sandwich and ice cream feeders, at the Delaware Early Childhood Assistive Technology Demonstration’s (DECATD) “fabricATe” workshop on April 7. Attendees were instructed by Therese Willkomm, clinical associate professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at the University of New Hampshire, who has designed and produced thousands of AT solutions for individuals with disabilities. A second, half-day hands-on laboratory also took place for staff from DECATD’s partner sites on April 8.

Gauging Delaware’s oral health needs

CDS has launched a survey to determine the dental care needs of Delawareans with disabilities. According to CDS studies, people with disabilities are less likely to have preventive dental care and are more likely to have all of their teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease when compared to people without disabilities. The information gathered through CDS’s new survey, which is funded by the Delaware Division of Public Health, will be used to develop training for dental professionals so they can better serve people with disabilities. A $10 Amazon gift card will be offered to each of the first 400 people who take the survey. If you are a person with disabilities or the parent of a child with disabilities and are interested in taking the survey, please contact Katie Rosch Hegedus at khegedus@udel.edu.
UD honors disability inclusion

The University of Delaware presented two new awards to members of the university community on April 14. The Mary Custis Straughn Excellence in Higher Education Disability Advocacy Award, which honors a member of the UD community who promotes access and excellence for people with disabilities in higher education, was given to Stephanie Kirschbaum, an associate professor in the Department of English and a disability advocate. Kirschbaum is collaborating with CDS’s Laura Eisenman to expand the UD Disability Studies minor to include an arts and humanities perspective and to build connections with faculty across campus.

The Kevin Miner Scholarship, given to a student who embodies leadership, advocates for himself or herself or others and takes pride in educational pursuits, was awarded to Guido Iammatteo, a senior in the Alfred Lerner College of Business and Economics. The award ceremony also featured guest speaker Lydia Brown, a disability rights advocate who discussed ableism, the discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

CDS trains health professionals on accessibility, sensitivity issues

Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities hosted a training session on April 20 at CDS for health professionals on how to be welcoming, accessible, and accommodating when working with people with disabilities. The training focused on defining disability, people-first language and strategies for developing accommodations to improve accessibility and inclusion. The training is based on the “Disabilities 101” workshop developed by CDS in 2013 to build capacity for the caring of people with disabilities at the intersection of disability, mental illness and domestic violence.

Swapping negatives for positives in class

Staff from districts across the state learned more effective methods for decreasing undesired student behaviors in the classroom at a workshop hosted by CDS’s Delaware Positive Behavior Support (DE-PBS) project on April 6. Through the use of the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce model, positive behavior support expert Rose Iovannone, assistant professor at the University of South Florida, instructed attendees on how to develop behavior intervention plans that focus on teaching students positive replacement behaviors, rather than solely eliminating their negative behaviors. CDS offered this training in partnership with the Delaware Department of Education.
School climate surveys receive national recognition

The Delaware School Climate Surveys and the Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale have been added to National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments' School Climate Survey Compendia. Both surveys, which were developed by CDS’s Delaware Positive Behavior Support (DE-PBS) project, were included in the national collection of school climate surveys in early April after passing a review process that verified their reliability and validity. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments seeks to improve schools through measurement and program implementation so that all students have the opportunity to experience academic success. The administration of the surveys and scale is led by the DE-PBS project and supported by the Delaware Department of Education. Schools can access the surveys here.

CDS joins advocates in nation’s capital

Hundreds of disability advocates, including Susan Veenema, instructional coach for CDS’s DE-PBS project, attended the 40th annual Disability Policy Seminar, held April 11-13 in Washington, D.C. The seminar, sponsored by organizations including the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, featured panel-led policy discussions on employment, housing and education. On the final day of the seminar, many attendees met with their members of Congress to help educate them about issues of concern to the disability community.
A CLSC production

Unified Theater, a UD campus organization that annually brings together students with and without disabilities for live performances, presented “A Mystery on Candy Lane” on April 21. Rebecca Jewell, a surveyor for CDS’s National Core Indicators project and Life Skills coach for the post-secondary Career and Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program for individuals with intellectual disabilities, directed the show. Seven CLSC students – Janell Booker, Isaiah Boykin, Malik Bradford, Brandon Brown, Steven Edwards, Morgan Jungling, and Zach Martin – helped to write, produce and act in the show, which follows the police pursuit of the murderer of a box of Nerds candy.

CDS is also currently seeking CLSC program applicants for the 2016-2017 school year. To learn more or apply, view the application packet or contact CLSC Director Brian Freedman at brianf@udel.edu or 302-831-4688.

Three summer programs offered on post-secondary transitions

Young adults with disabilities will have the opportunity to learn the skills they need to transition to post-secondary education or employment by participating in one of three programs being offered by CDS’s Transition, Education and Employment Model (TEEM) unit this summer. Sponsored by the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, programs include the Swank Employment Services intensive employment training course, the exploratory Summer CLSC residential program, and the Edge Extension pre-college residential program. For further information, view the summer programs flyer.
Lee presents in South Korea

The relationship between employment and health was the topic of a presentation given by CDS’s Health and Wellness unit director Jae Chul Lee on March 30 at the Vocational Rehabilitation International Conference in Seoul, South Korea. Lee called for improvements in the health of individuals with disabilities by increasing employment opportunities and developing competencies related to disability needs among health care professionals. He also discussed the impact that the health of people with disabilities has on vocational rehabilitation. Because the impact is so significant, there’s a need for increased research that focuses on how health impacts the type and quality of one’s employment, he said.

Mineo helps spur progress on accessible technology in schools

CDS Director Beth Mineo and the 18 other members of the Task Force on State Educational Technology issued a report to the state Legislature on March 30, offering guidance for increasing student access to educational and assistive technologies. Specific goals from the Task Force included ensuring that technology used in school is accessible to all students, that students’ assistive technology needs are met and that educators have the knowledge and skills necessary to help students use AT to learn and achieve. The group also made 12 budget recommendations for securing the funding needed to accomplish these goals. View the report here.
Talking transition in Pennsylvania

CDS Associate Director Brian Freedman spoke in April about the Center’s two-year Career and Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program at the 2nd Annual Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Symposium in Camp Hill, Pa. Freedman, who was joined by panelists from two other post-secondary programs for students with disabilities, discussed the components of the CLSC program: coursework, how students and families are supported during the transition from high school, and options for students following graduation. CLSC graduate Jay Siegel also participated on an alumni panel at the symposium, where he discussed the ups and downs of his own transition process.

ADVOCACY CORNER

This section is dedicated to informing you about advocacy efforts and new or pending legislation or policies that relate to individuals with disabilities.

Autism legislation passes state Senate

Bills seeking to enhance the effectiveness of professionals who provide services to people with autism passed the state Senate on April 14. SB 92 would authorize the hiring of additional “educational autism specialists,” at a ratio of one for every 100 students statewide. They would work with school districts throughout the state to better support the education of students with autism within their local communities. SB 93 would establish the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism, which would be housed at CDS, as well as an Interagency Committee on Autism. Among other duties, the Committee would be responsible for implementing the recommendations outlined in the 2013 Delaware strategic plan on autism. The Network would provide training for Delaware state agencies and private entities that provide services to individuals with autism. Both bills, which were sponsored by Sen. Margaret Rose Henry (D – Wilmington East), have been sent to the House for consideration. You can read a Washington Post report on the bills here.

Advocates, lawmakers consider Supported Decision-Making

A bill (SB 230) that “creates the option of a supported decision-making agreement for adults who do not need a guardian but who need assistance in gathering information, making decisions, and communicating those decisions” was reported out of committee on April 20. A few days earlier at a Dover summit on supported decision-making, the bill’s primary sponsor, Sen. Bethany Hall-Long (D – Middletown), said the bill not only would empower more people with disabilities to make decisions, but would afford them the “respect and dignity” they deserve. To date, only Texas and British Columbia have enacted legislation on supported decision-making. View Hall-Long’s bill, here.
Jamie Wolfe joins Inclusion blog roster

Advocate and policy analyst Jamie Wolfe will address issues of importance to the disability community as a new CDS Inclusion blog writer. Jamie is a former disabilities specialist with CDS and a former instructor of UD’s Senior Seminar in Disability Studies. In March, Wolfe was inducted into the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women, the first woman to have disclosed that she has a disability in the Hall’s 35-year history.

Read Wolfe’s posts, and those of other Inclusion blog writers, at blog.cds.udel.edu.

SOCIAL MEDIA

If you’re among the growing number of people who like CDS on Facebook, you saw that a team of UD student veterans, alumni, ROTC cadets and supporters will cycle from Washington, D.C. to Gettysburg, Pa. to increase awareness of military veterans and first responders who have become disabled while in service to the nation; you learned that Maryland is poised to become the second state to phase out subminimum wages for workers with disabilities; and you read how autism labels such as “low-functioning” and “high-functioning” routinely fail to accurately describe individuals on the spectrum.

If you haven’t yet liked CDS on Facebook, what’s keeping you? Connect with us now!

CDS on Twitter

In April, followers of CDS on Twitter heard about a group of Concord High School students who won a national engineering competition for creating new technologies to help people with disabilities in the workplace; learned about a UD College of Agriculture and Natural Resources student who is hoping to increase the quality of life for people with disabilities through accessible gardening projects in Wilmington; and read about how self-driving car technology could increase independence for people with disabilities, but that current legislation is keeping fully automated cars off the roads.

Get social, and follow CDS on Twitter!
New clearinghouse demystifies ABLE offerings

A new website launched in March by the National Disability Institute’s ABLE National Resource Center aims to be a one-stop shop for information about each state’s ABLE Act laws, regulations, and product offerings. States’ ABLE laws allow people with disabilities and their families to set up savings accounts for disability-related expenses that will not jeopardize their eligibility for federal benefits, such as Medicaid. The need for such a clearinghouse spiked following a late 2015 tweak to federal law allowing people with disabilities to open ABLE accounts in any state no matter where they reside. As states begin rolling out their ABLE offerings this year, site users will be able to compare one program to another using a list of 15 to 20 variables, such as a state’s total account limit.

Apple showcases voices of autism

In conjunction with the release of a short film in honor of Autism Acceptance Month, Apple launched a new portion of their App Store this month called “Voices of Autism.” The page features a collection of third-party apps for iOS devices that can help users with autism complete everyday tasks, such as speaking, typing, reading and learning to use a visual schedule. Also included are selections of autism-related books and podcasts that allow users to hear the stories of people with autism in their own words. To learn more, visit the Apple website.

EVENTS

May 3

Lunchtime Learning – Assistive Technology: Free and Within Reach See In the News.

May 4

Family SHADE membership meeting Representatives from organizations throughout the state serving children with special healthcare needs, as well as other interested members of the public, are invited to attend Family SHADE’s bi-annual membership meeting. In
addition to sharing updates regarding Family SHADE’s ongoing projects, the meeting will give attendees an opportunity to share information about upcoming activities and new initiatives with the group. All are welcome to bring flyers and brochures to give to others. The meeting will be held from 10:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at St. Jones Reserve, 818 Kitts Hummock Rd., in Dover. Registration is required. Please contact Annalisa Ekbladh at annalisa@udel.edu with questions.

May 18

Ensuring effective communication to meet ADA guidelines Hosted by CDS’s Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities project, this training will offer strategies to optimize effective communication between health professionals and individuals with disabilities, including a focus on how to work with individuals with a hearing impairment to enhance the quality of services they receive. Health professionals will be provided with an overview of the ADA, their responsibilities under the law and a summary of enforcement history. They will also receive instruction on how to communicate using auxiliary aids, resources for finding a qualified interpreter, and information on the duties and code of ethics of interpreters. The event will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m. at CDS, 461 Wyoming Rd., in Newark. This training is free, but pre-registration is required. You can enroll here. Sign-in will begin at 8 a.m. Please contact Bhavana Viswanathan at bhavana@udel.edu or 302-831-8374 with questions.

May 20-21

Community Emergency Response Team training Conducted by Delaware Citizen Corps, and sponsored by CDS, Christiana Care Medical Reserve Corps, and the Delaware Medical Reserve Corps, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training will educate community members about disaster preparedness. Attendees will learn basic disaster response skills, including fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT volunteers who complete the full 12-hour training will be provided with a certificate by Citizen Corps, which certifies them to assist others in their community following a disaster. The training will be held from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. on May 20 and from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on May 21 at the Delaware Biotechnology Institute, 15 Innovation Way, in Newark. This training is free, but pre-registration is required and spaces are limited. Registration closes May 11.

CONTACT US

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