PROJECT BRIDGE

MARCH 2015

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 April 15.

IN THE NEWS

Community Advisory Council member on WITN’s Window on Wilmington

In broadcasts that aired in March, WITN Channel 22’s Shannan Harris interviewed Linda Heller, president of the Hearing Loss Association of Delaware and a member of CDS’s Community Advisory Council, about audio loops. The devices allow people with hearing loss to hear more easily in different venues, but Heller noted that too few loop systems are operating in Delaware. Heller also discussed her association’s “Let’s Loop Delaware” project, which aims to spread awareness and the use of audio loops throughout the state. You can watch the open captioned interview on UD’s YouTube page starting on April 2.

CDS featured in AUCD 360

The state of Delaware’s plan to comply with the new CMS rule on community living and CDS’s response to it were highlighted in the March issue of AUCD 360, a monthly digital newsletter from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities. The feature included comments made by CDS Director Beth Mineo at a public hearing convened by Delaware’s
Division of Medicaid & Medical Assistance. "Delaware's transition plan is, of necessity, about compliance, but it could be so much more," noted Beth. She added that it "would be so much more powerful if it included a proactive component that could serve as a blueprint for how the services and supports system will look five years from now."

The piece also included a link to a News Journal story on Delaware’s response to the plan and a link to a video of a town hall gathering of advocates and experts which CDS hosted on the CMS rule.

PROJECT UPDATES

“Emergency” exercises now benefiting people with special needs

CDS teamed with the Delaware Division of Public Health to recruit several Delawareans who participated in the state’s Point of Distribution (POD) emergency training exercise on March 19. The exercise provided an opportunity for public health professionals to test emergency plans and to practice the distribution of simulated medicine to the public. The inclusion in the exercise of people with disabilities, chronic health conditions and their care providers helped to simulate scenarios that health officials might encounter. This was the first time that people with disabilities have participated in a Delaware POD exercise, increasing the likelihood that they will get the care they need in the event of a real emergency.

New childhood assistive technology collaboration

On March 20, the Christina School District’s Early Education Center became the second of three community partners to launch a collaboration with the Delaware Early Childhood Assistive Technology Demonstration (DECATD). More than 30 teachers from Christina attended the meeting to get hands-on experience with AT and learn from DECATD staff about how they can help families and service providers use it effectively.
With a little help from our friends

Students enrolling in UD’s Career & Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program, a two-year non-residential experience available to people with intellectual disabilities, are now eligible for federal financial aid. CLSC has been designated as a Comprehensive Transition Program, making students eligible to participate in work study programs and receive Pell Grants. This funding can be received in addition to aid from Delaware’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS). For more information, contact Mary Thomas at clsc-info@udel.edu or 302-831-2940.

CLSC students learn from CDS how to keep safe

Rochelle Brittingham from CDS’s Health and Wellness unit recently spoke to first-year CLSC students about the importance of emergency preparedness. Rochelle showed the students how to craft their own emergency preparation plans, and demonstrated how they can create emergency kits that are tailored to their individual needs.
**STAFF UPDATES**

### Steve Smith presents in Houston

CDS’s Steve Smith and Sarah Celestin from the Delaware Department of Education presented the plan for CDS’s ACCESS Project’s Standards-based IEP (individual education plan) Initiative on March 22 at the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference in Houston. The Initiative is testing a model to teach IEP development and coaching based on the state’s academic standards in several pilot districts. The pair also shared early results of the program, which have been largely positive. Pilot districts are showing improvements in the written quality of multiple sections of IEPs and developing more individualized and data-driven IEPs for their students. Smith and Celestin were also interviewed for an article on the initiative in Special Ed Connection, a website that provides news and resources related to special education. The article provides several IEP development tips such as how to interpret data to tailor an IEP to a student’s needs. You can access the article through the [Special Ed Connection website](http://www.specialedconnection.com).

### SOCIAL MEDIA

**CDS on Facebook**

If you’re among the growing number of people who like CDS on Facebook, you got word of a culinary vocational education program teaching work readiness skills to Sussex County teens with disabilities; you read about a UD graduate student and licensed personal trainer with one leg who adapts exercises for others; you learned that students with disabilities are more than three times as likely to be suspended in secondary schools; and you heard about renewed efforts in Delaware to repeal the death penalty, which advocates argue disproportionately affects people with disabilities.

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

**CDS on Twitter**

In March, followers of CDS on Twitter learned that nearly 80 schools in Delaware participated in “Spread the Word to End the Word” and pledged to stop using the R-word; discovered that 25 restaurants in Philadelphia are being reviewed by the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania regarding their compliance with the ADA; and heard about a film on romance involving adults with autism making its debut at the Tribeca Film Festival in NYC.

Get social, and [follow CDS on Twitter](http://twitter.com/CDSDE)
RESOURCES

New accessible programming for children now available

The U.S. Department of Education has launched the Accessible Television Portal project, which provides free children’s television shows with closed captioning for students with hearing loss and descriptions of what’s on screen for students with vision loss. The project began with 73 episodes of 19 television shows from producers such as PBS Kids, Sesame Workshop and Sprout, with plans to add more content over the next two years. To gain access to the programming, parents, teachers and other professionals who work with qualified students must apply. Once approved, the content can be accessed in the classroom or at home on computers, mobile devices and televisions. For more information, visit the project’s website.

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.

Delaware’s ABLE Act legislation passes House

The Delaware House of Representatives passed House Bill 60, the Delaware Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, on March 31.

The bill, should the Senate pass it and Gov. Jack Markell sign it, would enable Delawareans with disabilities to set up a savings account, with tax breaks similar to 529 savings plans, which allow families to save money for college. Funds initially deposited into the account would be taxed, but the interest that accrues would be tax-free, allowing the savings to compound over time. ABLE account funds could be spent in a number of areas, such as education, health care and assistive technology.

In addition, Delawareans with disabilities would be able to save more than $2,000 in ABLE accounts without the risk of becoming ineligible for public benefits such as SSI, SNAP and Medicaid.

State Rep. Michael Barbieri helped Kayla Kosmalski call the vote on H.B. 60 in committee on March 25.
Delaware’s plan on community-living rule consumes Joint Finance Committee

On March 19 in Dover, members of the Joint Finance Committee heard the state’s top Division of Medicaid & Medical Assistance (DMMA) official apologize for not hosting hearings in all three Delaware counties on the state’s response to a new federal rule on community living. Then they heard him commend CDS for helping gather residents’ responses to surveys on community living that gave officials a better read on how the public views services and supports. Then, the members of the committee got an ear full.

From people with disabilities. From family members. From service providers. And from disability-rights advocates. All of them expressed concerns about how the state, in practical terms, will implement the new rule on community living from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, which is expected to increasingly steer funding to home- and community-based settings and away from institutional settings.

DMMA Director Stephen Groff applauded CDS for its role in helping DMMA gather information from adults with disabilities and family members. Information collected through surveys addressed community services and opportunities respondents are receiving or would like to receive. More than a quarter of some 200 comments the Division ended up getting from the public concerning community living and services came from the surveys, Groff said. They were summarized in the plan the Division sent to Washington, D.C. in March, which notes how the state intends to comply with the CMS rule.

But Groff and others also noted that the state should have held more than two public hearings to gauge public opinion on the CMS rule. “We’re committed to having hearings in all three [Delaware] counties in the future,” Groff said.

Opinions that Joint Finance Committee members ended up hearing from scores of organizations and private citizens returned to money. Some said Medicaid funding shouldn’t go to where “bureaucrats” want it in the wake of the new rule, but where “the people” want it. Some expressed concern that funds have yet to be allocated to support what could be a fundamental shift in how people receive services in the community. Others called for funding that can begin paying administrative costs needed to implement the CMS rule. And still others warned that redirecting Medicaid funding to community-based supports and services will do nothing to raise seriously low reimbursement rates for service providers.

EVENTS

April 4

Organizing Special Education Documents – The Parent Information Center of DE is presenting a workshop from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Bear Public Library to help families create an effective organization system for their child’s education documents. You can also learn how to develop a student snapshot that will help school staff better understand your child. For more information, visit the event’s website.
Lunchtime Learning: starting a reaction

On April 9, Karl Booksh, professor of chemistry and biochemistry at UD, will lead a Lunchtime Learning session that addresses why so few students with disabilities pursue an education in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The session will also explore how the University of Delaware could develop a model STEM program that better attracts and serves students with disabilities. For more information and to register, visit our Lunchtime Learning flier.

April 18 & 25

Annual Walk for Autism – April 18: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes. April 25: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Fox Point State Park in Wilmington. The event is Autism Delaware’s largest community fundraiser, drawing more than 2,000 people in support of individuals and families affected by autism. To register for either walk, go to the walk’s website and click on the link for the appropriate location.

April 29

Lunchtime Learning: Healthy Transitions - 12 p.m. - 1 p.m. at CDS in Newark. Cory Nourie from Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children’s Division of Transition of Care and Annalisa Ekbladh from CDS will discuss how to better understand health care transitions for young adults and how to empower them to manage their own health care. CDS’s new Healthy Transitions smart phone app will also be presented.

Visit the CDS calendar for more upcoming events.
CONTACT US

The University of Delaware’s Center for Disabilities Studies is located at 461 Wyoming Road, Newark, Delaware, 19716. Please call us at 302-831-6974 or 302-831-4689 (TDD), send an email to ud-cds@udel.edu or visit our website at www.udel.edu/cds. You’ll also find CDS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/UDeICDS.


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