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 June 15.

GRADUATION

A classic convocation

UD’s Career and Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program graduated its third cohort of students at the College of Education and Human Development Convocation on May 29. The two-year CLSC program provides students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to set career goals and develop skills vital to accomplishing them. CLSC grad Jeffrey “Jay” Siegel has his sights set on restaurant and hospitality services. Albert Wilson is pursuing a career in advocacy and office administration. And Conor Rifon is following his passion for landscaping and hopes to work in a plant nursery.
IN THE NEWS

WDEL 101.7 highlights emergency preparedness for people with disabilities

WDEL covered the Hurricane Season Preparedness Symposium hosted by CDS and Delmarva Power on May 15. The event at UD’s STAR Campus stressed the importance of people with disabilities preparing for potential summer storms and educated them about available resources, including CDS’s AllReadyDE website that helps people with disabilities create personal readiness plans and the delawaretips.org web app that provides first responders with information about assisting people with disabilities. The event also addressed power outage readiness, personal preparedness and generator safety. To read the CBS-radio affiliate’s post, visit the WDEL website.

Community Connectors event appears in UDaily

UDaily featured the annual DJ Bash, which brings adults with disabilities in the CDS-sponsored Community Connectors program to campus. On May 15, those adults got to dance the night away with UD resident assistants. Each group also got to learn from the other in a relaxed atmosphere. Community Connectors offers support programs and utilizes an individual’s goals to connect that person with on-campus organizations, events and services. It also works to help participants build skills, network and socialize. To read the article, visit the Udaily website.

PROJECT UPDATES

UD helps students with disabilities get an “edge”

High school students with learning disabilities can now take part in a program that offers them a taste of the college experience. CDS has developed an extension of UD’s Edge program, which allows participating high school students to take college courses, live in UD dorms and participate in workshops on college life over five weeks in the summer. One of the courses the students will take is called Metacognitive Strategies and is being designed by Vincent Varrassi, a New Jersey author and special education consultant. The course will teach study skills and help the students become self-advocates within a college setting. For more information about the program, contact CDS Associate Director Brian Freedman.
Members of CDS’s Delaware Positive Behavior Support Initiative (DE-PBS) discussed how to improve school climate and implement the Prevent-Teach-Reinforce model at the 2015 Northeast Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Leadership Forum at the University of Connecticut on May 21 and May 22. Megan Pell detailed how she helped the William Henry Middle School improve its climate through professional development activities, such as one designed to remind teachers of the importance of being respectful to all students. Pell also spoke about the importance of using multiple data sources when trying to improve school climate, such as discipline referrals and climate assessment surveys.

Debbie Boyer, Susan Veenema and Eileen Baker addressed how to implement Prevent-Teach-Reinforce (PTR), a model used to conduct functional behavior assessments and develop behavior support plans for students with behavior needs.

Boyer, Veenema and Pell also highlighted during the conference’s poster session how inclusion has been shown to increase positive perception of a school’s climate and boost the academic success of students with disabilities.

**Summer jobs for high school students with disabilities**

CDS is offering a pilot employment program to high school students with disabilities, ages 16-21, this summer. For eight weeks, the Swank Employment Services Summer Program will offer experiential learning opportunities in the classroom, around the Newark community and in community-based internships. It is designed to help the students set career goals, gain essential job skills and build self-determination to prepare them for the workforce.
A magnificent floor mural created at the 2013 Artfest creative workshop and community celebration is now on permanent display at CDS. The 15-foot long canvas, transformed into three wall panels, came together through the efforts of Art Therapy Express, people with disabilities and student volunteers who used paint rollers, stamps, footprints and wheelchair tire tracks.

Lisa Bartoli, director of Art Therapy Express, joined CDS staff for the mural’s unveiling on May 20. “It gives the artists and the painting the recognition it deserves,” she said of the installation. “It is a true masterpiece created with heart and lots of joy.” Also attending the unveiling was Michele Sands, a former unit director at CDS, who helped organize and promote Artfest 2013.
CDS celebrates its graduates

Four past and present CDS graduate assistants and one former CDS undergraduate intern received degrees at the College of Education and Human Development Convocation on May 29. They are Rebecca Vitelli, a graduate assistant who currently supports CDS’s Communications and Advocacy unit; Katie Hoffman, a former graduate assistant who supported the communications unit; Carly Herring and Audrey Rossi, graduate students who currently support CDS’s Transition, Education, and Employment Model (TEEM) unit; and Micah Bernard, a former undergraduate intern who supported the TEEM unit. The five CDS graduates were among 45 CEHD students graduating with a minor in Disabilities Studies. Congratulations, all!

Milbourne presents in Chapel Hill

CDS project director Suzanne Milbourne discussed how supporting a child’s participation in everyday activities can help develop functional skills at the 2015 National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute at the University of North Carolina on May 12-14. At the University of North Carolina-hosted event, Milbourne also explored assistive technology and how it can be used to help a child do tasks independently. And, she promoted teaching practices that rely on social interaction and the use of AT.
Sparling presents on oral health

CDS principal investigator Eileen Sparling addressed current barriers to dental care for people with disabilities at the Delaware Division of Public Health’s Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services 2015 Oral Health Forum in Dover. She also noted how CDS worked with the state to develop a plan to overcome these barriers. Sparling was also one of five community members recognized at the forum as an Oral Health Champion for her dedication and leadership in promoting oral health.

SOCIAL MEDIA

CDS on Facebook

If you’re among the growing number of people who like CDS on Facebook, you learned about a young woman with autism in Rehoboth Beach who reportedly was pressured to leave a public bench; you heard about Democratic Vice President Joe Biden’s career-changing experience involving a Republican senator who happened to be a parent of a child with disabilities; and you read about a Delaware high school senior with a learning disability who was honored for 13 years of perfect attendance.

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

CDS on Twitter

In May, followers of CDS on Twitter got word of a Christina School District workshop that helps parents navigate services for their children with special needs; learned about an online movement calling for toy manufacturers to make more items that positively reflect disability; and got good news about a formerly missing New Castle Special Olympics champion who was returned home safely.

Get social, and follow CDS on Twitter!
RESOURCES

Free professional development course offered online

The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston has developed an online professional development course for paraprofessionals and teachers’ aides who work with children with disabilities. The course offers three modules: Fostering Independence, Positive Behavior Supports, and Communication Skills. You can access the course at no charge at the ICI 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 bills aim to improve autism services in schools

Sen. Margaret Rose Henry (D–Wilmington East) introduced Senate Bills 92 and 93, which together make up what’s being called the ”Autism Services Advancement Package,” on May 12. SB 92 would enhance resources available to the Statewide Director of Autism Educational Services so that all public schools can access consistent high-quality training and support for teachers and staff serving children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. SB 93 would establish the Interagency Committee for Autism and create the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA). The DNEA would be centered at CDS and would provide a central resource for collaboration, training and technical assistance across public agencies. The legislative package reflects suggestions in The Blueprint for Collective Action, Delaware’s statewide plan for autism services, which CDS facilitated.

EVENTS

June 3

Laura Eisenman to join talk on ADA at UD – The faculty coordinator of UD’s Disabilities Studies minor will join a panel discussion on the ADA from 2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Morris Library. Laura Eisenman and two other panelists will speak about disabilities services available within the Morris Library and elsewhere on campus. They will also promote understanding of how better to support users with special needs. For more information, read the UDaily article on the event.
June 4

Desiree Kameka: National Autism Speaker – Autism Delaware will host Desiree Kameka, director of Community Education and Advocacy for the Madison House Autism Foundation, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., at the Bear Public Library. Kameka will discuss housing options and support opportunities nationwide. To register for this free event, call 302-224-6020 or 302-644-3410. For more information, visit the event’s website.

June 13

DSA Fun Day at Aerospace Education Foundation – The Down Syndrome Association of Delaware will host a day of educational activities with the Delaware Aerospace Education Foundation, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., at the Delaware Aerospace Education Foundation in Smyrna. This event is open to all ages and siblings are encouraged to attend. For more information and to register, visit the event’s website.

June 20

Delaware Foundation Reaching Citizens Blue-Gold All Star Football Game – DFRC sponsors this annual football game, which showcases the state’s best high school football players, cheerleaders, band members and school ambassadors. It will be held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Delaware Stadium in Newark. Throughout the year, these students raise awareness and understanding in their schools about people with intellectual disabilities. For more information and to buy tickets, visit the game’s website.

Visit the CDS calendar for more upcoming events.

CONTACT US

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