

Meet Us

Strong communities
include all of their
members!



Read
how people
are gaining better
access to educational,
employment and
financial opportunities
— and how that
benefits everyone!

MEET THE COUNCIL

Founded by federal legislation in 1971, the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) was tasked with making systemic change for the 158,000 people in Georgia who have a disability or who have a family member with a disability. Through advocacy and consensus building, its mission is to promote opportunities for everyone to live, learn, work, play and worship in Georgia communities.

To best implement positive change, GCDD focuses on **five key areas:**

- Real Careers
- Real Homes
- Real Learning
- Real Support
- Real Influence

GCDD further advances inclusion and self-sufficiency throughout Georgia by partnering with nonprofits and community and business leaders, which has had an impact on surrounding communities.

GCDD funds initiatives provided by nonprofits. It also promotes grassroots advocacy by encouraging state residents to contact their local legislators and be vocal about needed policy changes, getting everyone involved in the fight for inclusion!



We All Belong

Everyone has something to contribute to our community

by Thea Marie r ood

If asked to describe our “ideal community,” we all might have different answers. Some of us may prefer the friendliness of a small town, while others may gravitate toward the hustle and bustle of a big city.

But no matter where someone calls home, there is one action that will help each place reach its full potential — welcoming all residents within a community.

“Everybody — regardless of who we are — wants to be part of our community ... and included in that community on the basis of our talents and gifts,” said Eric Jacobson, the executive director for the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities.

How do we make sure that happens?

“All of us — not just people with disabilities — need five things to be a productive member of our community,” he said. “First, we need the opportunity for a career, a real job, someplace we go every day and earn real money.

We also need a real home that we have the keys to, and our name is on the lease or we own it. And for someone with disabilities, that sometimes means it has to be accessible as well.”

The next three components are also universal.

“We all need to be able to go to school and get a real education,” Jacobson continued. “We all need real quality



“Everybody — regardless of who we are — wants to be part of our community ... and included in that community.”

Eric Jacobson
Executive Director, Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

supports, but people with disabilities sometimes need paid kinds of support. Finally, we all want to have influence on what takes place around us.”

Society has made progress in including people with disabilities thanks to a focus on these five areas, particularly in employment and education.

“All people can go to work,” he said. “... We’re focused on going to a real job with real pay. Also, we are realizing students with disabilities can go to college and have a college experience.”

Jacobson credits many of these

advancements to the Georgia state legislature.

“We need to acknowledge and thank the legislative champions who have been with us over the years and supported our advocacy issues,” Jacobson said. “Without them, we would not be making this progress — they are the ones who allocate funds and pass laws.”

But there is still more work to be done. Jacobson advised that even everyday interactions can make a big impact. These interactions aren’t ones that come through programs and supports for people with disabilities, but rather everyone else they come into contact with in their lives.

“Say you give someone a ride to church: That may be what they need to participate in that community, because they physically can’t get themselves there, and that is the barrier to being included,” Jacobson said. “Sometimes ‘inclusion’ is as simple as that — just giving someone a ride.”

Alan Bittaker weighed only 1.9 pounds at birth.
Photo by L yNSEy WEAth ERSPoo N

From Zero to 110 Percent

He survived and thrived after an extremely premature birth

by S h a N N o N T U r N e r

Weighing 1.9 pounds at birth in 1962, Alan Bittaker was the smallest male in America to survive when he was born during the sixth month of his mother's pregnancy. His mom, Annette, has no idea what caused her to go into premature labor, but as it was her second pregnancy, she could tell the difference right away.

"It had been a troubled pregnancy from the beginning," she recalled. As a result, Alan had many of the challenges that so often accompany premature birth. He was given a zero percent chance to live, and his chances didn't improve for a very long time. For the first 15 years of his life, he was in and out of hospitals with seizures, pneumonia and asthma attacks.

Then one day, many of the health problems that had been plaguing Alan seemed to vanish. Annette said that the family didn't understand or appreciate the transition that had occurred. "After

all those years of not being able to travel very far from doctors and always having emergency plans, it felt like we remained on high alert for about 10 years after his last hospital stay," she said.

Annette attributes the change in Alan's health to two factors: His lungs matured, plus advancements in medicine. Alan's father was in the Air Force, so Alan was receiving top-notch, free treatment through military hospitals, especially when they lived in California. Now 56 and living independently since 1993, Alan is a happy and relatively healthy man with autism, cerebral palsy and some visual impairment due to his premature birth.

Alan owns his own small home through an income-dependent mortgage from the USDA. If his income changes, then his mortgage payments have some flexibility.

Of all the things Alan is proud of in his life, working at Walmart for more than 30 years is high on the list. Alan's



income is supplemented with Social Security disability payments and a COMP Medicaid Waiver. The waiver pays for his supported employment.

A job coach comes to work with Alan once a week to check on his behaviors, schedules and reporting. Most significantly for both Alan and Annette, the waiver pays for an aide to come to his home three hours a day to assist him with daily activities such as creating and implementing his to-do list, meal planning and grocery shopping. All of

Alan's services are run through Unison Behavioral Health Agency, which led Alan and Annette through the application process.

As science has continued to improve over the course of Alan's life, many things have come to light. "Every one in so many thousand pregnancies works out this way," Annette said. "As statistics happen, sometimes you're the statistic."

Alan likes to put it this way: "I went from zero percent to 110 percent."

"Every one in so many thousand pregnancies works out this way."

Annette
Mother of son who weighed 1.9 pounds at birth



WHAT IS A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY?

The state of Georgia identifies a developmental disability as a disability that is severe, chronic, mental and/or physical. This disability becomes apparent before the age 22 and is expected to last a person's lifetime.

People with developmental disabilities typically require supports in three or more of the following life activities: self-care, language, learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living and economic self-sufficiency.

Willow Clark found stability
with a place to call home.
Photo by L yNSEy WEAth ERSPoo N

A Design for Happiness

Young woman with a love of fashion finds a
forever home

by S h a N N o N T u r N e r

Willynisha Clark lost her Medicaid funding two years ago, but she might have lost a lot more. At the time, “Willow” was living in a group home for women with developmental disabilities run by Jamilah and Jamie Taylor. Fortunately, this compassionate couple decided to take Willow in and invited her to live with them in their own home in Thomasville.

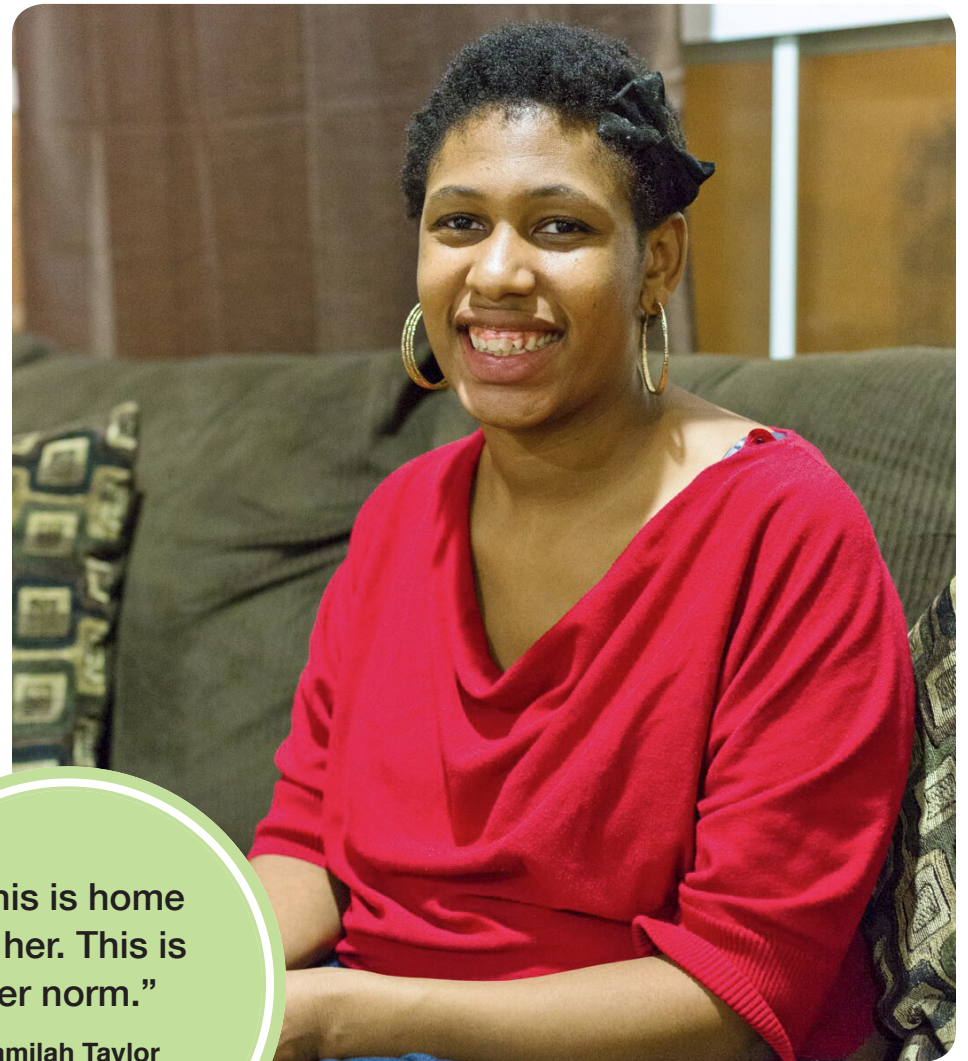
“She’s family,” Jamie said. Jamilah agreed, “This is home for her. This is her

norm. We didn’t want anything to happen to her. Just because of a piece of paper or waiver or some money or something, she would have to go and be in conditions that would be unknown to her. We didn’t feel like that was going to be the right move for her life.”

“It’s very good,” said Willow, now 22. “I could be

“This is home
for her. This is
her norm.”

Jamilah Taylor
Caregiver



somewhere worse. I don’t want to be living under no bridge.”

At one time, Willow lived in a group home that she really didn’t care for. “It had one TV and 19 other girls,” she said. “We had to watch cartoons most of the time because there were a lot of little girls there.”

These days, Willow watches “NCIS,” “Criminal Minds” and her favorite, “Say Yes To the Dress.” That makes sense, given her love of fashion. “Everything has to have symmetry,” she said. “I’m kind of OCD like that.”

Willow was denied a Medicaid waiver because she was in a “gray area” of being just a few IQ points too high for qualification. However, she also is not able to work in most jobs because of her anxiety, difficulty with problem solving and a cognitive impairment. A lot of her family is either deceased or no longer

around. “My bio-family doesn’t do a good job of keeping in touch with me,” she said. “I saw some of them on my 19th birthday, and it wasn’t until then that I found out that I had two nieces.”

Willow has a passion for fashion, sketching dresses with an eye for design. She has participated in beauty pageants through the Easter Seals program. She loves to dance, noting that it’s very good exercise.

The one thing Willow has had nearly her entire life is her Beanie Baby collection; it’s moved with her repeatedly. In her room, she shows off the Beanie Babies along with her perfumes and clothes.

Willow was lucky. When she was denied her Medicaid waiver, she may have been homeless and jobless. The Taylors are happy to have her as a part of their family and that she’s found her “forever home.”



WHAT IS A WAIVER?

Home and community-based waivers are sets of optional Medicaid services that states can choose to make available to people with disabilities that allow supports to be accessed right in their own communities — rather than being forced to receive them in a sequestered institutional setting. Waivers can help people find a home, job, caregiver or different therapies.

Here’s what else they can do:

- Help the more than 6,000 Georgians waiting for a waiver
- Create more jobs and pump money back into local economies
- Keep families out of crisis
- Save taxpayers money (on average, waivers cost less than institutional settings!)

Rolling on With Life

Waiver program helped him regain freedom

by SHANNON TURNER

On a hot summer day, Jake Ricks dove into a shallow creek. He was 15 and felt invincible. “I dove into the creek like I’d done with my buddies many times before,” he recalled. “It was just one of those things.”

But his life changed forever. That dive on July 7, 1996, shattered the C5 vertebra in his neck. He was paralyzed from the chest down.

Even though Jake’s accident was in July, he only missed two weeks at the beginning of that school year as he quickly adjusted to using a motorized wheelchair. “Back to life,” he said. “I got thrown back in the mix. My family has always believed that you play the cards life dealt you. You don’t let anything hold you down. Everybody gets down a little, but I never got mad at the world or depressed. I had too much life left to live.”

Jake had been a member of his school’s marching band, and his band teacher found it really important to keep

him involved. “I learned how to play different percussion instruments with my hands, and I would still march with them – but now I just rolled at football games instead of marching,” he said with a chuckle, “and I even did all the parades. You find out who your true friends are when something like that happens.”

“One thing I’ve always had is a great support system as far as in my family, not necessarily financially. That’s what the ICWP (Independent Care Waiver

“Everybody gets down a little, but I never got mad at the world or depressed. I had too much life left to live.”

Jake Ricks
Paralyzed at age 15



Jake Ricks and his service dog, Ollie, both benefit from Jake’s caregivers.

Photo by L yNSEy WEAth ERSPoo N

Program) allowed me to do. Have freedom,” Jake added. “It’s definitely changed my life.”

His waiver pays for caregivers who come in a couple hours in the morning and at night to help him bathe, dress, cook and even help wash Ollie, his service dog.

Jake works for a nonprofit organization, Lives Without Limits, which “strives to help people with disabilities by

providing them with outdoor recreation and specialized medical equipment at little to no cost.” Most days, Jake drives his van, which has been fully modified so that he can drive independently.

Jake knows firsthand the importance of ICWP. “It’s made me the person I am,” he said. “Without the ability to get up and go every morning, and the support I do have from it, I don’t know what I’d do. It makes it all possible.”



WHAT DO HCBS WAIVERS MEAN FOR GEORGIA?

Home and Community-Based Service Waivers (HCBS) ...



Make a small dent in the **6,000-plus Georgians on the waiting list** for a waiver



Create jobs and pumps money back into local economies



Keep families out of crisis through respite care and ensuring family members keep their jobs



Save the taxpayer money, as HCBS waivers, on average, cost less than institutional settings

Picture of a Happy Home

by Moira BUCCIARE LLI



A WAY TO WORK

Photographer enjoys life with the help of her caregivers

Nandi Isaac finally feels home. Nandi – short for Nanditha – gets emotional as she recalls painful experiences from her group home life – in one instance being told to pack up and move on short notice; in another being confronted and shouted at by a staffer. These distressing experiences have led Nandi, at age 35, to move back in with her parents.

This time, she moved into a small apartment her architect father built for her. It is just a stone's throw from her parent's simple ranch house and aquaponic garden on a wooded lot outside Macon. Nandi's family paid for all the construction and furnishing of the apartment.

Nandi is a woman with a visual impairment and Down syndrome. She stands at the doorstep of her very own home, thrilled to have visitors to show around. The walls of her bedroom feature beautiful framed photographs taken by Nandi – a smiling dolphin and a graceful sailboat. She discovered her talent for photography through a club called Shutterbugs.

Nandi is able to thrive and succeed at home due to the love and dedication of her parents. Her mother, Nalini, spends 20 hours or more per week on Nandi's support, care and advocacy. But Nandi also has a participant-direct COMP Medicaid Waiver that allows her 50 hours of caregiver support each week.

Having these caregivers allows Nandi to enjoy a vibrant community life where she contributes through meaningful roles. Nalini explained

about the positive impact of the waiver: "It has vastly improved Nandi's independence, self determination, ability to work and general quality of life."

Nandi also has been able to supplement her income through entrepreneurship. With the encouragement and guidance of her care team, Nandi used her interest in photography to start her own small business, "Scan with Nan."

Her caregivers are critical to giving Nandi the support she needs to set goals and allocate time for her photo scan orders, but also to participate in her numerous community and social events.

She spends about 20 hours a month engaged in volunteer and community service. She serves on boards and does advocacy work. Recently, Nandi was hired by the "Living Well Georgia" project. In that role, she will co-train direct support professionals about "supported decision making."

"The waiver has given us joy to see Nandi able to live her own life and to grow in so many areas," Nalini said. "We have peace in knowing that it is possible for Nandi to live a good life in her dream home. We thank God that she has these wonderful opportunities and experiences."

"The waiver has given us joy to see Nandi able to live her own life and to grow in so many areas."

Nalini Isaac
Nandi's mother



Nandi Isaac and her mother, Nalini, are happy about all that Nandi has been able to accomplish.

Photo by hAyLEE FUCINI-LENKEY

GCDD works to improve employment opportunities for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Georgia through their support of:

Project SEARCH - This high school transition program started in Cincinnati, Ohio. Project SEARCH prepares young people with disabilities for success in integrated, competitive employment. It is currently being replicated in 39 states and four countries. GCDD has helped organize a statewide Project SEARCH Initiative, which arranges for technical assistance and training for teams that would like to have Project SEARCH in their community. There are currently 13 Project SEARCH sites in Georgia and five others in the planning stages.

Advancing Employment - Dedicated to building a community for inclusive employment in Georgia, this program helps individuals with disabilities, their families, service providers and others interested in employment learn and connect with one another. We believe competitive integrated employment is possible for everyone.

Take Your Legislator to Work Day - This is an opportunity for employees with disabilities to invite their legislator(s) to visit them at work. The goal of this program is to show the far-reaching benefits to employers, employees and communities alike of hiring people with disabilities, as well as to create opportunities for Georgians with disabilities to form and nurture relationships with their elected officials.

Happy on His Own

With supports in place, young man
finds his stride

by **Shannon Turner**

Thanks to support from his state-funded waiver, Demarcus Chaney works four days a week at the Easter Seals Day Program. He is a 31-year-old man with mild intellectual disability living in Vienna, GA. He works on the janitorial staff and loves to clean.

Since 2007, Demarcus has lived in his own apartment just about five minutes away from work. His mom manages his finances. “My momma is a good person,” he said. “My whole family is good.”

He’s gotten really good at living on his own. He loves his apartment. “My mom taught me how to take care of...you know, responsibility,” Demarcus said.

He likes to cook, which he learned from his mom. Hamburger Helper, hot dogs and baked chicken and rice are his specialties. Sometimes, on special occasions, he gets some deer meat, and makes it into patties with ground beef, bell peppers and onions.

Demarcus said that if he had a day all to himself, he would choose to exercise. He loves to walk and to “hang out with all kinds of people, but only good people,” he said. He’s also an extremely active member of his Baptist church, participating in Sunday School and serving as an usher. He loves learning

stories from the Bible in his Sunday School class.

If he could have another job or get more training, Demarcus would really like to work in construction. “I like to fix stuff,” he said. Demarcus has state funding rather than a Medicaid waiver, which pays for his Community Access Group, pre-vocational services, training for job skills, and supported employment with a job coach.

“Demarcus receives state funding rather than Medicaid,” explained Stacy, Demarcus’ case worker and job coach. “It’s very similar, but just a different pot of money.” Without the support Demarcus receives, he would live a much more isolated life, be much more dependent on his mother and struggle with finding and holding a good job where he can feel successful like he does now.

While Demarcus’ future seems pretty solid with the supports he already has in place, he still has dreams and aspirations. He’d like to be on ESPN’s “SportsCenter” as a commentator like Stephen A. Smith. But first, he’d have to get over his shyness, he said. Demarcus added he could do that if he could talk about sports all the time.

“My mom
taught me how
to take care of...
responsibility.”

Demarcus Chaney
*State-funded waiver
recipient*



Demarcus Chaney has had his own apartment since 2007.

Photo by Lynsey Weatherston



HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED WAIVERS

Home and Community-Based Waivers (HCBS) are known by different names, but they all support people with disabilities and the aging living in their own homes. They are also known as:

NOW/COMP:

The New Options Waiver/ Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program. This waiver supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

ICWP:

Independent Care Waiver Program. This supports people with significant physical disabilities and traumatic brain injuries.

SOURCE/CCSP:

Service Options Using Resources in a Community Environment/ Community Care Services Program. Both serve elderly and disabled Georgians.

We Are All Georgia



CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR TODAY!

If you are passionate about making your community a better place or just want to help more people be heard, the best place to start is by reaching out to your local legislator.

Join the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities' Advocacy Network to:

- Track legislation
- Interact with elected officials
- Receive policy alerts
- Get guidance on how to talk to legislators

Visit <http://bit.ly/joinGCDD> to sign up!



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www.gcdd.org**

The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) is able to empower so many people with developmental disabilities and their families thanks to its network of partners. Together, these partners are known as Developmental Disabilities Network for the state of Georgia and collaborate to enact change and create new programs throughout the area.



Helps people with developmental disabilities achieve independent, self-determined, inclusive and productive lives by turning research into sustainable community practices.

**404-413-1289
www.cld-gsu.org**



Empowers people with disabilities to enhance their quality of life and achieve their highest capacities through education programs and outreach projects that touch every corner of the state.

**706-542-3457
www.fcs.uga.edu/ihdd**



Works with and for individuals throughout Georgia who are oppressed and vulnerable and have been labeled as disabled or mentally ill. Advocates for these people and offers them protection.

**800-537-2329
www.thegao.org**