



GAPSE Newsletter

Georgia Chapter of APSE: The Network on Employment

December 2008

Special points of interest:

- 2008 Conference
- GAPSE Employment Grant
- Public Policy



GAPSE Board

Phil Chase,
President

Jean Mevoli-Cannon,
Vice President

Adele Patrick

Joel Cribb,
Secretary

Sabrina Tuten,
Treasurer, Newsletter
Editor

Patty Cassidy
Membership

Cindy Burns

Bob Poston

Libby Casares

Highlights from the GAPSE President

Another Great Year!

You might recall I began the “Highlights” column in our last newsletter issue with “As I enter my final 4 months as GAPSE president...” fully intending it would be. My colleagues on the GAPSE board asked all the current officers to serve one more term – it is an honor to serve one (only) more year. Jean Mevoli-Cannon continues as GAPSE’s vice president, Joel Cribb as secretary, and Sabrina Tuten as treasurer. I greatly appreciate the contribution these officers make. Thanks also for the leadership and commitment to persons with disabilities our board members Cindy Burns, Libby Casares, Adele Patrick, and Bob Poston continue to demonstrate. As board members, we are proud of GAPSE’s accomplishments and the direction we are going. We continue to believe it is an exciting time to be a GAPSE member! We’ve had some “highlights” and a few “lowlights.”

2008 Annual Conference – JOBS!

We have just completed another outstanding annual conference. We billed this one as the best ever and I think it met that expectation in terms of program content. Seventy-one persons attended the conference; half the number of people who usually attend this event. We thank those of you who were able to attend. You reported you had a terrific learning experience. Our regrets that many of you who wanted to attend couldn’t due to the economy and travel restrictions.

Presenters were outstanding and I wish I had space to share all the conference evaluations with you. Thanks to the Georgia Advocacy Office and Employment First Georgia we were able to offer a pre-conference workshop featuring Michael Callahan. Comments such as “He’s fantastic! – This was an absolutely brilliant and eye opening presentation – An excellent added treat,” etc. were expressed. Deb Russell representing Walgreens opened the conference and received a very positive evaluation. Comments included: “Love Deb’s energy – Great presentation – Enjoyed everything.” Our keynoter for the second day was Denise Bissonnette. Denise was clearly a favorite: “Wonderful – Great - Schedule more time next visit – She is the best I ever heard – Please invite her next year – Her energy is contagious.” Last but not least, Mindy Oppenheim was our closing keynoter and you liked her as much this year as last year: “I’ve seen her 2 years in a row and would like to see her again next year – She is really good – Thank you!” Presenters in the concurrent sessions received similar positive evaluation comments. Only a couple “lowlights” to report such as “Food was horrible & Room was steel cold!”

2009 Annual Conference

The 2008 conference was not cost-effective for GAPSE. We recognize it is impossible to place a value on what 71 persons learned from Mike, Mindy, Denise, the concurrent session presenters, and each other; however, we cannot operate our organization effectively and take another financial loss of this magnitude. With regrets, the GAPSE board of directors agreed that we would not offer the traditional 3 day conference in 2009. When offering an annual conference, we are committed to a training event of the very highest quality. Quality conferences cost dollars. We value all our members as well as all supported employment service providers, supported employees, and families of supported employees. People attending the 2008 conference shared multiple training needs. We will evaluate these needs and offer 1 day training events at central locations during 2009. More to come.

2010 National APSE Conference

As most of you know, GAPSE has been invited to co-host the national APSE conference in 2010. Board members are determining if we have the needed level of support within the state to undertake this venture. By the first of the year, we hope to advise the national APSE leadership that Georgia is ready to co-host the finest national conference ever offered. In our next issue of this newsletter, we anticipate offering you the opportunity to join us in planning the 2010 National APSE Conference to be held in Atlanta.



SE: Building bridges to a better tomorrow

Highlights Continued:

Membership

GAPSE membership fluctuates between 95 – 100 persons. Although this is an increase from recent years, we are only scratching the surface of those organizations and individuals who should be GAPSE members. There are over 100 organizations in Georgia that employ job coaches, employment specialists, and job developers. There are many supported employees and families of persons with disabilities who would benefit by being members of GAPSE. Also, supported employment services and GAPSE membership can be a valuable resource to employers. If you are a member, thanks – please renew your membership when it is time – you can now renew online. If you are not a member, please join us. A strong member base is essential if we are to influence public policy.

Public Policy

Public policy, specifically the restoration of state funds for supported employment services to people with mental illnesses, will be a very high priority for our organization. Please see “Public Policy Update.” Your input will be valued.

GAPSE AWARDS MONEY FOR EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

GAPSE funds have been awarded to two individuals who, with the assistance of their job coaches, will be able to be gainfully employed. These awards evolved from a discussion at a meeting of GAPSE board members in 2007. Because GAPSE had some extra funds, board members decided that, in addition to sponsoring conferences and training opportunities, we could use these funds and “put our money where our mouth is!” We decided to award up to \$5000.00 to assist a person or persons with disability to reach employment goals. We hope to be able to make similar awards in the future with the intention of assisting someone who probably could not reach his/her employment goal without our financial aid.

To receive financial assistance from GAPSE, the following conditions had to be met:

- The individual and/or his/her sponsor must be a GAPSE member and a legal resident of the U.S.
- The individual must have a documented disability that is severe in nature.
- The individual must have a good plan for gaining employment.
- The individual or his/her sponsor must complete the application located on the GAPSE website.

The individual or his/her sponsor must agree to providing GAPSE with monthly progress reports as the funds are utilized and employment is achieved.

One grant has been awarded to a person who utilizes services of the Cobb Douglas Community Service Board and will become employed in her own home-based sewing and alteration business. She will be awarded funds to cover the cost of a sewing machine and a sewing center. A second award was made to a person participating in the Employability program of Georgia Community Support and Solutions. This individual will receive specialized equipment to become employed an office assistant.

We thank those of you who applied for this grant on behalf of persons attempting to reach their employment goals. We congratulate the two applicants and two recipients of this award. Thanks also to Adele Patrick, Jean Mevoli-Cannon, and Cindy Burns, board members who led this initiative. We are extremely hopeful that we can offer this resource to our members again.

Public Policy Update:

In our last issue of the GAPSE Newsletter, I indicated GAPSE was in the process of finding its' role in the public policy arena. I also shared that GAPSE leaders were exploring ways to make employment the first option and the preferred outcome of all Georgia youth and working age adults with disabilities. Before we can advocate for employment being the first option for Georgians with disabilities, we must have programs in place to support employment as the outcome.

As you are aware, Georgia has less revenue than expected when the '09 state budget was approved. Supported by Governor Sonny Perdue, the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget required all state agencies to submit budget reduction plans of 6%, 8%, and 10% for FY '09 and FY '10. GAPSE received the response of the DHR board and was shocked to learn that the board accepted the recommendation of the Division of MHDDAD administrators to eliminate all state funding for the mental health supported employment program. This makes it appear that our own state mental health administrators don't understand how work is an essential part of a person's recovery. Many of you joined us in an active letter writing, telephoning, e-mailing, and media campaign voicing our objection to where the cuts were made. Obviously, our complaints and protests were not meaningful as mental health service providers are losing their jobs and people with mental illnesses are not receiving essential supported employment services.

Recently, on behalf of the GAPSE board of directors, I sent an invitation to all GAPSE members and select GAPSE organizational partners to join together in a legislative work group formed specifically to address the elimination of state dollars for the mental health supported employment program. Our purpose is not to voice more complaints but to develop an awareness of the importance of supported employment in a person's mental health recovery and to identify strategies for advocating constructively for the restoration of state mental health supported employment funds. To date, the following persons have committed to being part of this work group: Lakendra Baker, Libby Casares, Phil Chase, Retina Dawson, Jean Mevoli-Cannon, Rebecca Nelson, Adele Patrick, Bob Poston, Tangel Shelton, Marcie Sitton, Steve Sundberg, Debbie Walker, April Warner, and Ken Whiddon. If you are interested in joining us, please e-mail me at pchase@uga.edu or call at 1/866-248-4764.

Phil Chase

Welcome our Newest Board Member!**Meet Patty Cassidy**

We are pleased to announce that Patty Cassidy has been elected to serve a three term on the GAPSE board of directors beginning January 2009. In addition to serving as a board member, Patty has volunteered to lead our membership initiative. Most of you know Patty and are aware of her valued history with APSE. She was a member of Colorado APSE and Indiana APSE before continuing her membership in Georgia. Her service to Indiana APSE is worth noting – Patty was co-president and vice-president of the chapter; she also spent some time as membership chairperson.

Patty's impressive career has been totally related to supported employment initiatives and we are honored to include her as a GAPSE leader. Patty states: "I want to do my part to ensure that GAPSE remains a positive force in this difficult time of budget cuts, Medicaid Waiver change, and the development of new providers. I am excited about the possibilities, challenges, and the opportunity to serve." Regarding membership: "I believe that strong membership serves to increase the quality of services and programs, gives individuals and their families' information to assist with the selection of quality providers, and will also serve to build future leaders of employment supports in our state." If you are interested in working with Patty on the Membership Committee or just want to be in touch, she can be reached at cassidyf@aol.com.

GAPSE: The Georgia Network on Employment is a member organization formed to improve and expand integrated employment opportunities, services and outcomes for persons experiencing disabilities. If you are not a member of this very important movement we invite you to join our group. Visit the GAPSE website at www.gapsenetwork.com

GAPSE

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2009 Schedule of Board Meetings & Teleconferences:

In addition to an annual membership meeting, the GAPSE board of directors formally meets six times per year. Three meetings are face-to-face at Star Choices in Macon and three meetings are via teleconference. All meetings are open to GAPSE members; we ask that you notify a board member prior to the meeting you plan to attend so we can ensure adequate space or telephone lines. The 2009 meeting schedule is:

DATE*	LOCATION	TIME
January 22	Star Choices, Inc., Macon	11:00 a.m. = 2:00 p.m.
March 26	Teleconference	10:30 a.m. = 11:30 a.m.
May 21	Star Choices, Inc., Macon	11:00 a.m. = 2:00 p.m.
July 23	Teleconference	10:30 a.m. = 11:30 a.m.
September 24	Star Choices, Inc., Macon	11:00 a.m. = 2:00 p.m.
November 19	Teleconference	10:30 a.m. = 11:30 a.m.

*An additional meeting(s) may be scheduled by request of a board member.