



GAPSE Newsletter

Georgia Chapter of APSE: The Network on Employment

March 2009

Special points of interest:

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- Public Policy



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Highlights from the GAPSE President

When writing or speaking, I appreciate folks who put a positive spin on issues. Perhaps today's focus of *GAPSE Highlights* should be about ways the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed into law by President Obama on February 17th, will improve the economic well-being of people with disabilities. This law gives much attention to maintaining and creating jobs. Since few people with disabilities participate in the workforce, we certainly hope that new opportunities will abound for people with disabilities. The economic stimulus plan includes several billion dollars earmarked for Georgia – we want to be able to count on Governor Perdue to use some of these funds to restore the dollars eliminated from the mental health supported employment programs. Yes, the plan talks about jobs and earmarks dollars for Georgia; however, we have no assurances that people with disabilities will benefit.

These are troubling times! It is difficult to even ascertain from Governor Perdue's revised state budget that there are people living in Georgia who have disabilities, much less, Georgians with disabilities who want to work. If our elected officials and appointed administrators recognized that disability is a natural part of the human experience, they would realize that many Georgians have disabilities and need supports to work and enjoy life. Supported employment programs, proven to be effective, would be valued, not eliminated. In our last newsletter, GAPSE asked interested persons to join a Public Policy Work Group to develop an action plan in response to the Governor's elimination of state dollars for mental health supported employment programs. We have excellent evidence that work is an essential part of a person's mental health recovery process and establishment of a good quality of life. Also, Georgians with disabilities and professionals who serve individuals with disabilities need supports that are made possible by state funds. Many of our members have been unable to take advantage of skill development opportunities due to budget reductions; members in administrative positions have had the task of reducing staff; and, some members have had to find new employment, often outside their chosen profession. Georgians with disabilities cannot secure the needed supports to "choose work."

GAPSE's Public Policy Work Group communicated with elected officials regarding our disappointment in their budget reduction decisions. We also had the privilege of meeting with Audrey Sumner, Director of the Office of Mental Health & Addictive Diseases, and Mary Shuman, Mental Health Supported Employment Coordinator, to express our concerns. We were heard; however, we received no assurance of a recommendation to restore funding. The Work Group developed a Fact Sheet "*Necessity of Restoration of Funds for Supported Employment Services for Persons with Mental Illness.*" The Fact Sheet was distributed to legislators and key staffers during Disability Day at the Capitol and Mental Health Day at the Capitol and will be available at our website (www.gapsenetwork.com). Please download and use it. Anyone who is interested in becoming part of this important Work Group should give me a call (706 542-1360) or send me an e-mail (pchase@uga.edu).

In lieu of our statewide conference, GAPSE has three mini-training sessions in the planning stages. The first, "*Job Development in a Recession,*" will be conducted by Mindy Oppenheim. This will be a two-day workshop held in the Atlanta area or Macon. We anticipate the workshop dates to be April 20 & 21. More to come.

With a significant change in national leadership, including a new executive director, national APSE is taking a very good look at itself and its' relationship with state chapters. If you haven't read the most recent "*the Advance,*" distributed electronically on March 3rd, I encourage you to do so. We know our national leaders worked diligently with the Obama transition team to help frame components of the Economic Stimulus package to enhance integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Their work should give us some leverage as we attempt to influence our legislators to restore supported employment dollars. (continued next pg 2).



SE: Building bridges to a better tomorrow

Highlights continued:

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In mid-January, the APSE Board, Foundation Board, and Regional Chapter Delegates held their first collaborative retreat. With the assistance of an outside facilitator, a revised mission statement was adopted: "*APSE leads in the advancement of equitable employment for people with disabilities.*" Also, a finalized vision for APSE has been announced: "*In 2012, APSE is leading the nation in establishing employment as the first and preferred outcome for all working-age adults.*" APSE is accomplishing this by:

- Advancing a Global Employment First Initiative.
- Establishing & impacting federal & state policy.
- Increasing the number of people with disabilities who are employed.
- Providing leadership, direction, resources, & assistance to its constituency.
- Expanding collaboration & partnerships with the broader community.
- Promoting strength-based hiring & management practices within the business community.
- Strengthening the infrastructure to 50 state representation, fully staffed offices, & a healthy membership & financial base.
- Building a diverse & well-connected national & foundation board that practices exemplary governance.
- Using the latest tools to connect with constituents & build the community.
- Developing, expanding, & diversifying new leaders.
- Utilizing the power inherent in our grassroots membership through collaboration with the Delegates Council & state leaders.
- Partnering with the Foundation to develop meaningful opportunities to attract & engage donors, sponsors, corporations, and entities that align with our values.

State chapters are an integral part of APSE and decisions made by our national leaders directly influence the direction of GAPSE. The GAPSE board of directors will discuss the implications of what this means to us in terms of our chapter activities. Your input or questions are welcome.

I continue to be amazed how well our board, our members, and our partners perform during a crisis. Thanks for your advocacy efforts with legislators, elected officials, and key state administrators. Your efforts will make a difference. Phil Chase.

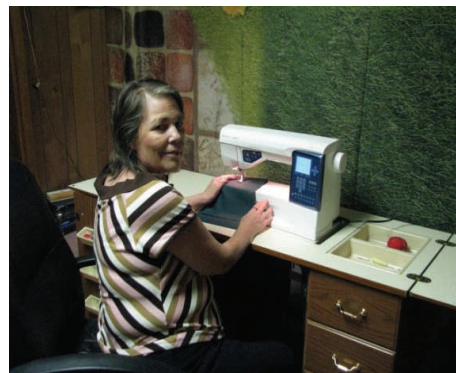
Welcome our Newest Board Member!

Meet Debbie Walker

We are pleased to announce that Debbie Walker has been elected to serve a three year term on the GAPSE board of directors beginning calendar year 2009. Debbie has worked in the human services field for more than 23 years. Since 2004, she has been Program Manager of WORKTEC MHDDAD. Until the recent budget cuts, WORKTEC was the second largest provider of state-contracted MH supported employment. Debbie's recognitions include "Honoring Partners in Recovery," an award from the Georgia Certified Peer Specialist Project, and a "Heroes in the Fight" recognition and nomination in 2007. Most recently, Debbie has been an integral part of GAPSE's Public Policy Work Group.

Supported Employment Spot Light

Beverly Thomas always dreamed of starting her own business sewing, but never thought this dream could become a reality until she got a little help from the Mental Health Treatment Study and GAPSE. Due to her mental health Beverly had not worked since 1994 and doubted if she would ever be able to work again. That all changed when she got a call from the Cobb/Douglas Community Services Board, which is one of 22 sites from across the country participating in the MHTS initiative. The study is sponsored by the Social Security Administration, in collaboration with Dartmouth, and is focused on better access to treatment and employment support services, and examines outcomes such as medical recovery, improved functioning, employment needs, and benefits monitoring. The study's outcomes will impact the way in which the Social Security Administration will operate its SSDI program over the next decade. Beverly and her Employment Specialist began the process of Discovery and after an attempt at wage employment it was determined Self Employment would best fit her desires.



It was at this point that fate smiled on Beverly and an opportunity to secure funding was presented to her through GAPSE. Beverly and her Employment Specialist applied for and were generously awarded \$2,200 to help finance the dream. Beverly has used this money to purchase a top of the line sewing machine and a sewing center. With these purchases and her own know how, she was able to set up shop providing sewing and alteration services. Using flyers, the internet, and great word of mouth advertising Beverly's business has started to take off. Asked what this grant has meant to her, Beverly responded, "Independence!" She has begun making contacts in the community and reports, "I think it's going to go even better than I thought". She has also stated that since receiving the grant her mood and energy have improved knowing that she has something to look forward to. Beverly's business, which is called: "It's Sew Nice" is located in Douglasville, GA and she can be reached at itsewnice@gmail.com or 770.489.0960.

Article submitted by Brian Palumbo, Cobb Douglas CSB.

A Community Friendship Success Story

Steve was 18 years old when first diagnosed with a mental illness and 19 years old when his addiction began. He dropped out of high school, and had difficulty maintaining a job or a relationship. He was jailed for disorderly conduct stemming from behaviors related to his illness. He transferred from jail to a local hospital, and then moved to another hospital. Steve knew little about schizophrenia, and had difficulty accepting this diagnosis.

Steve started smoking marijuana to relieve the stress of his symptoms and escape from his disappointments. His behavior was erratic. He spent two months between different hospital psychiatric wards. He would spend the next 30 years in and out of hospital, attempting to "self medicate" to deal with his loneliness, isolation, and thoughts and behaviors that he did not understand.

Steve sought relationships and opportunities, but his addiction and instability led to serious difficulties. At age 32, his 7-year marriage ended as a result of his alcoholism. He also experienced the loss of his brother to a drug overdose. Despite a desire to work, he was unable to maintain a job. He experienced ongoing career and relationship ups and downs throughout the years and finally hit bottom. In 1992, Steve was 32 years old and he moved to Atlanta. He started to attend Alcoholics Anonymous support groups, but life with schizophrenia remained challenging. Often struggling, he became homeless for the first time in 2003. He felt unsafe in a temporary shelter setting and relapsed. He did not want to be homeless, alone and sick. He wanted to work but was scared and unable to maintain his motivation.



Three years ago, Steve came to CFI to get his life back on track. CFI's continuum of services offered support and hands-on assistance through each stage of recovery. In the Day Services program, he developed a better understanding of his illness and learned strategies to manage his symptoms successfully. Steve's hard work and dedication helped him identify vocational goals and the steps needed to reach them. In the Work Opportunities Program, he focused on his sobriety, skill-building and increasing independence and has learned how to work with others to achieve his potential. He maintains a job at the Fox Theatre and resides in CFI's supported housing program. Steve has completely turned his life around and is a remarkable role model for others just beginning their work of recovery.

"CFI helped me to turn my life around. They were with me every step of the way...all the way through to finding and keeping my job. Who would believe I could do all of this?"

Article submitted by: Jean Mevoli-Cannon : Community Friendship Inc.

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

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Job Coaches Corner:

For “New on the Field” Job Developers....

Nowadays, given the economic time that is being shared by many individuals, resourcefulness must be at the forefront of our agendas. Many individuals, with Developmental Disabilities or Mental Health issues feel at a loss at the time of looking for work. They come to us with their hearts full of expectations, not having many times a clue of what needs to be done in order to start making “good things happen”. We, as Job Developers, must be fully and constantly aware of the many dynamics our clients face in their personal lives that become meaningful hurdles at the time of “stabilizing” them.

How are we going to be promoting meaningful impact in their lives?

Our first step is to equip them with information. Next we should always presume competence, so they live up to it. Lastly we should be “painting the big picture” in such a way that even in spite of their personal circumstances, they buy into it, being an integral part of the process.

How are we going to achieve it? By breaking it into reachable, quantifiable few steps at the time.

What needs to be done to start a successful job search?

The most practical approach is to use a “discovery process”, in which information already existing and provided by the client is used to determine the right path to follow.

The discovery process involves getting to know the individual at a more personal level. Learning about their life experiences, their family’s input in all that is related to them, their dreams, their preferences, even their “obsessions”. This information will become far more important than standardized instances of past performances.

When are we going to be developing the plan? When we carefully and patiently determine:

- What works and what does not
- By pinpointing client’s preferences, contributions and conditions for employment.

By including job tasks, employment sites (with which the client feels comfortable with) and many different job leads that might benefit the applicant primarily discovered by what revolves around him; where do they go to buy groceries? Where do they go to church? Who are the family friends?

It needs to be made clear that while this “discovery process” is only a blue print by which we will guide our next steps. It does not guarantee a job, but it sure opens multiple doors for limitless opportunities when we match the unmet needs of an employer to the very specific “culture” of an applicant. Successful match will soon be on our way!

Article submitted by: Libby Casares,