Finding New Pathways

This issue includes the legislative priorities of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights and the Community of Vermont Elders, the policy priorities of Disability Rights Vermont, a call for true political power for the poor, stories of home sharing, employment and food, and a collection of stories of leaders and independent living from VCIL.

On Feb. 19, VCDR will celebrate Disability Awareness Day at the State House. The keynote speaker is Chester Finn, a national leader in the self-advocacy movement and a respected voice for social change. Vermonter Max Barrows — one of our own leaders in self-advocacy — once interviewed Chester, who told him: “You can’t just rely on the past. The next ideas on disability services coming out of the government have been shaped by us ... Attitudes and directions have to change.”

The advocates and community members whose lives and work are reflected in this issue are part of this change. So are you — our readers. Thanks for sharing your stories and concerns and for speaking out for change.

~ Deborah Lisi-Baker, Editor

PHOTO BY MORGAN W. BROWN
The lawn of the Vermont State House is shrouded by snow on Feb. 10, 2013.

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Letters to the Editor

Forced Medication Bill
A Cause For Concern

The Legislature is considering a bill this year that would change the law on how fast people can be forced to take medication when they are held against their will by the state because their mental health condition allegedly makes them dangerous.

The bill is S.287 (http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/2014/bills/Intro/S-287.pdf) and one part of it would change the law so that the state could file a petition for involuntary medication concurrently with a filing for commitment. This could reduce the time it takes to force a person to take powerful psychoactive medications that the doctors believe will help the person recover the capacity to make reasonable decisions and get better. And this could help the crowding in our current system by moving individuals more rapidly through inpatient treatment.

Another possibility is that this sort of speeding up of the process could lead to more people being involuntarily medicated and living with the trauma that may result. And extra days in inpatient settings should be measured against mistrust of the mental health system that can last for years.

Please visit www.VCDR.org and www.disabilityrightsvt.org to learn more about this legislation and be sure to share your thoughts with your state senators and representatives!

Ed Paquin
Barre Town

Ed Paquin is the executive director of Disability Rights Vermont.

To Our Readers

Due to the loss of state funding, VCIL has become the primary financial sponsor of The Independent. Our thanks to individual subscribers and to Disability Rights Vermont, VocRehab Vermont and the Vermont Development Disabilities Council for their financial sponsorship of this issue.

We are glad to be publishing again. We regret the long gaps between issues. State budget cuts over the last few years directly affected The Independent and VCIL is only able to publish occasionally. If you appreciate and believe in this publication, please consider contributing financially. Your subscriptions and donations have helped us in the past and continue to be important today. Any funds sent for this paper are used for publication and mailing costs and do make a difference. They help us bring the independent voices of everyday Vermonters to their neighbors and policy-makers; and bring senior and disability issues into the public debate. We welcome your comments, responses and ideas. Thank you for being part of The Independent!

Deborah Lisi-Baker and Stefanie Monte, Editors
Involuntary Medication Bill Could Infringe On Due Process Rights

by Sarah Launderville

The room was cold. I remember it being very cold. Lights were bright and there were people who I did not know telling me to trust them. Trust you? The voices kept telling me not to trust them.

I could see my mother. Scared. She did not know what to do anymore. I could hear whispers but they were overpowered by the voices. Then silence. I was in Strawberry Shortcake land enjoying the sweet-smelling beauty and calmness of my adventure. Pink shoes and sweet treats filled my thoughts.

My mother’s memories of me are very different during that time. Charcoal used to get the substances out of my system. Screaming at her. Lying unconscious on the floor. She was scared and had nowhere else to turn but to the professionals who might understand.

I hear voices. I have times when I cannot remember my name and sometimes think I am someone else. I have a hard time sleeping and have racing thoughts. And, on occasion because of these symptoms, I have been taken against my will, locked up in hospitals and had psychotropic drugs shot through my body in the name of safety to self and others. Drugs not to “treat,” but to make you shuffle along in life and act like someone else wants you to act.

The medication put me in a state in which I could not fight for my rights. Many who have gone through this procedure called “treatment” will tell you that it is worse than some of the symptoms that got them there. In some ways it is very similar for those of us who have experienced trauma.

It is very, very difficult for those who have not experienced it to understand.

I have heard from others who have similar stories. You are brought to a place in which people are to help you. They want you to be better. They want you to trust them. In the end, they create a state of uncertainty, leave you in a room and watch you through a video camera. Sometimes you realize they are watching you and you try to escape the humiliation, the extreme suffering. They assume you do not feel, or understand what is going on, but sometimes you do. Sometimes you do not know how you got there, but then you wake up restrained and screaming. You need to meet their expectations before they remove the restraints. Back to a childhood experience in which you had no power and they have all the control. You find peace with the voices in your head, because that is who you are and who is there for you.

Legislators have to make a decision about whether to take away the due process rights of individuals. They need to hear about the process from the perspective of individuals who have lived through it, not from our doctors or families but from those whose rights have been taken away. The full picture will allow lawmakers a greater understanding of what these experiences are like from those who have been through it.
Three Penny Honored For Commitment To Accessibility

The Vermont Center for Independent Living recognized a Montpelier pub on Oct. 24 for its commitment to accessibility, giving Three Penny Taproom its Rosemary J. Miller Dining for All Award.

The award is named for VCIL’s longtime receptionist, who retired in 2011 after more than 30 years on the job. Miller, who was born with cerebral palsy, has never let her disability slow her down. Her passions include dining out, shopping and advocating for disability rights.

VCIL Executive Director Sarah Launderville said, “We could not think of a more fitting way to honor Rosie than by creating an award to recognize a Vermont eatery that offers dining for everybody.”

She added, “We hear from people with disabilities who are not able to access restaurants because there are stairs, or the bathroom is too narrow. We hear from others that they are treated with disrespect. We wanted an award that highlights a restaurant for doing a good job. The Three Penny certainly fits that description and we salute them.”

In 2012, Three Penny Taproom expanded into the storefront next door, allowing it to expand its kitchen and to add a dining room and a wheelchair-accessible entrance. Stauffer Woodworking of East Calais did the renovations to the restaurant.

Kevin Casey of Montpelier, who nominated the pub for the Dining for All Award, said, “I was pleased to see that the Three Penny Taproom really worked hard to make sure that their renovations were as accessible as possible, with two accessible bathrooms, wide aisles and gently sloping floors between the two spaces in lieu of what would have historically been a step.”

Scott Kerner, co-owner of Three Penny Taproom, a restaurant well known for its high quality craft food and craft beer, said, “We are honored to accept this wonderful award. We were lucky to be able to make our restaurant accessible with the expansion.”

Other nominees included:
• Church and Main in Burlington.
• Sarducci’s in Montpelier.
• Whetstone Station Restaurant and Brewery in Brattleboro.
• Subway in Bennington.
• Wayside Restaurant in Montpelier.

The award will be given out annually and nominations are currently being sought for 2014. If you would like to nominate a restaurant, please email Stefanie Monte at smonte@vcil.org or call her at 1-800-639-1522. Please be sure to tell her where the eatery is located and what steps have been taken to ensure that they provide dining for all.
Northfield Woman Makes It A Wonderful Life

by Stefanie Monte

During the most wonderful time of the year, a young Northfield woman was honored by the Vermont Center for Independent Living. At its annual holiday open house on Dec. 12, Catrina Audet was presented with the Deborah Lisi-Baker Leader of Tomorrow Award.

Audet, who has a developmental disability and a learning disability, not only helps out on her family farm, she also has been volunteering at VCIL for close to a year.

Lisi-Baker, a former executive director of VCIL, is a powerful disability rights advocate and gifted poet. She is well-known for her dedication to and love for young people. The annual award given in her name was first presented in 2007. Previous recipients include Ash Brittenham, Harwood Union High School for its “Speak Out for Understanding” initiative, Aaron Tardiff, Olivia Smith-Hammond, Alaina Clements and Alexander Gallagher.

In presenting the award, Lisi-Baker said, “When other young people come to VCIL, Catrina helps them feel welcome and does the kind of things that help us all have a wonderful life by being there and being committed to disability rights and to inclusion.”

Lisi-Baker added, “Her dream is to continue to do that work and to be able to have equal opportunities in employment and independence and to bring her vision to the world as she grows up and continues the work of the independent living movement. We honor her because she decided to start this work young.”

Audet assists VCIL with various tasks, including organizing the library, helping with mailings and making copies. She also assists with games and crafts for the youth nights that VCIL holds on a weekly basis. She is a member of Green Mountain Self-Advocates and volunteers at a senior center and at a local soup kitchen serving meals. She also helps out her grandmother by acting as her personal care attendant once a week.

Art Show

Another highlight of VCIL’s holiday open house was an art show by Sharon Pine’s second/third-grade class at Montpelier’s Union Elementary School. As part of a class project, the children interviewed family members and friends who have disabilities and then created portraits, such as this one by Ava Hallingsworth. The project was a good way to learn about people with disabilities, and the colorful artwork was very much enjoyed by people attending VCIL’s holiday open house.
Beloved Activist Remembered For Awesome Life

The disability rights community is mourning the loss of a crusader for human rights. On Nov. 9, 2013, Peg Franzen, beloved activist and leader, died at her home surrounded by family and friends.

Peg was one of the founders of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. She served on the board of directors and for years worked as VCIL’s advocacy director.

After leaving VCIL, Franzen became the president of the Vermont Workers’ Center. She encouraged the human rights campaign that brought together the strong partnership of VCIL and the Vermont Workers’ Center.

James Haslam, director of the Workers’ Center, said, “I know Peg’s powerful spirit will continue on in so many of us. We can hear her voice telling us what is important and what needs to be done, we can hear her cheering us on, and reminding us we are all awesome.”

A Boston native, Peg moved to Vermont in 1970. After having two children, she and her husband made a decision to adopt children with disabilities. Because of the need to get services and expose their children to other people with disabilities, they became active with a new group called LIVE that worked to make Burlington more accessible. Through this work, Peg learned about the independent living movement and was asked to host a statewide gathering of people with disabilities. This meeting ultimately led to the creation of VCIL, one of the first 10 independent living centers in the country.

Peg once said, “Our mission was to empower individuals to have control of their lives and to have the choice of where they wanted to live and access to the services that would allow them to live with dignity and quality of life.”

“Throughout her years at VCIL she taught us how to come together no matter how powerless we felt and to use our voice to be change agents in our community,” said VCIL Executive Director Sarah Launderville. “She taught us to live and love life to the fullest and she will be missed.”

Her sense of humor and ability to bring people together was incredible.

It is difficult to talk about the life of this amazing woman without mentioning her spouse, longtime VCIL employee Joyce Werntgen. The remarkable team of Peg and Joyce, strong advocates for hope and change, will long be remembered. Their partnership, hard work and ability to make others feel that they matter was amazing.

To borrow Peg’s favorite word: She was truly AWESOME!

We miss you, Peg.
CareerACCESS Program Seeks To Enhance Employment Access For Young People With Disabilities

National advocates are working to enhance employment options for young people with disabilities by getting to the heart of the problem, addressing the way the Social Security benefits program works and enhancing options through a pilot program to allow young people to seek employment and stay involved in competitive employment.

According to The CareerACCESS Program Legislative Summary developed by the World Institute on Disability, the National Council on Independent Living and PolicyWorks, the pilot project design will:

• Establish new eligibility entrance requirements eliminating tests for work incapacity. Applicants with a disability under the age of 28, who meet the current SSI income and resource rules, are auto-enrolled in an alternate benefit program.

• Implement a cash and counseling approach, similar to successful Medicaid models, to provide life coaching services to enrollees and their families. Services include: counseling and guidance on navigating systems, benefits planning, asset development, health care access, as well as career planning and coaching.

• Test major simplification of SSI earning/work rules to include allowing CareerACCESS project participants to keep their full federal SSI stipend until gross earnings exceed preset limits in the current 1619(a) and (b) rules, to offset expenses and the high costs of managing disability. Allow participants to benefit from work by eliminating asset building limitations, so that assets saved and acquired are held harmless. Asset development is key to stabilizing financial independence. Establish enrollee-friendly, online wage reporting, tracking, and information services.

• Modify the SSI program rules over time for all SSI youth based on the pilot project findings and outcomes. Sunset the program on or before 12 years, depending on objectives met.

Twenty-two-year-old University of Vermont graduate and Vermont resident Zak Schmoll told his story to help advocate for these important changes. He said, “Raising the earned income threshold for SSI is actually going to end up being crucial for me to work because quite frankly, I’ll probably earn enough money that I will go over that threshold at some point in my career and I still need some of my benefits. I still need to be allowed to earn while retaining, particularly, my personal care attendant services.”


Alaina Clements
Named To SRC

VCIL’s Alaina Clements has been appointed by Gov. Peter Shumlin to the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council. The SRC advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Clements is the program specialist for the Home Access Program and the Sue Williams Freedom Fund at VCIL. She has worked at the nonprofit disability rights organization since 2009.

VCIL Executive Director Sarah Launderville said, “We are so happy that she was appointed to this important council and know that she will bring her knowledge of adaptive equipment and understanding of the importance of employment for people with disabilities to the SRC’s work.”
Letter to the Editor

The Real Pathway Out Of Poverty

What people living in poverty truly need most is real political power.

This begins with being allowed to speak for and represent themselves and having ample opportunities to meaningfully participate in any policy-making and other decisions made about them at various levels, whether political or otherwise, and either as individuals or as a group.

What people living in poverty do not need any more of is having others speaking and making decisions for them, most especially not those who have their own or an organization’s agenda and interests at stake.

Regrettably, Governor Peter Shumlin’s newly established “Pathways Out of Poverty” initiative falls seriously short of what is in fact required; and, additionally, has all the appearances of merely being a new version of the same old thing and not much else. This is yet another well-meaning initiative and council that, as usual, has more to do with funding programs and aiding certain political agendas and interests than it has to do with helping people most in need.

Rather than being “pathways out of poverty” as is purported, this will likely only lead to additional dead ends and could be just another setup for failure...for which, ironically, the person living in poverty will typically be found to blame.

Unless and until people living in poverty have a real and meaningful say about any and all policy and programs intended to help them out of poverty, nothing will ever truly change, no matter how much funding is found and dedicated to the effort.

Only real political power in the hands of people living in poverty will ever make a difference and create lasting change.

Anything else is a poor substitute. Nothing else should be acceptable. Those in power and authority should know better. As those of my peers within the disAbility community are fond of saying: Nothing about us, without us!

Morgan W. Brown
Montpelier
Home Sharing Provides A Lot More Than Housing

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the economic recession led to an increase in home sharing in this country. A recent report states that between 2007 and 2010 the number of shared households increased by 11.4 percent while all households increased by only 1.3 percent. The report also notes that official poverty measures were lower among people sharing housing. The report concludes that household sharing appears to be a means of alleviating economic strain at the household level.

That's not a surprise to those of us who work to facilitate home share matches in Vermont. The report confirms what we are seeing: More people, both in numbers and diversity, are looking to share their housing. Home sharing benefits people of all ages and incomes. Participants include individuals, couples, and families. They want companionship, household assistance, money savings and a secure way to find housemates, or want to reduce their personal consumption and carbon footprint. What they all have in common is a desire to share housing and resources.

Through Home Share Now, former Vermont Center for Independent Living employee Janis Moore helps 97-year-old Dorothy live the rural, agrarian life to which she is accustomed. Janis gets to enjoy Dorothy’s stories and a safe, warm, accessible and affordable home. Two summers ago, Dorothy, Janis and her dog, plus a small herd of cows were joined by pullets and ducks when Janis built a chicken coop. It brings Dorothy joy to watch the hens walk around and eat insects, and to have the ducks come to the kitchen window to visit. Last summer Janis grew such an incredible garden that Dorothy filled the freezer and together they ate good vegetables and soups all winter. Home sharing maintains the Vermont way of life — what’s not to love?

Vermont has two organizations that promote and facilitate home sharing. Home Share Now serves communities in central Vermont while HomeShare Vermont serves Chittenden, Addison and Grand Isle counties. Their comprehensive screening and matching process helps people find the most compatible housemates. In Central Vermont, log on to www.HomeShareNow.org or call 802-479-8544. In the Champlain Valley, contact www.HomeShareVermont.org or call 802-863-5625.

The full census report can be found online at http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p60-242.pdf

VCIL Director Named To National Board

At last summer’s National Council on Independent Living conference, Sarah Launderville was elected to represent New England (Region 1) on the NCIL Board. The executive director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living will assist the NCIL board and committees in building and coordinating a grassroots coalition to advance NCIL’s advocacy activities as the organization works to advance independent living and the rights of people with disabilities.

Also at the summer conference, Launderville received the NCIL Region 1 Advocacy Award for her dedication to promoting the rights of people with disabilities and advancing the independent living movement in New England.

“There are so many wonderful advocates in our state and everyone deserves this award,” said Launderville.
Vermonters are an honest and hardworking people, but many still struggle with the high costs of housing, fuel, and food. Hunger among the elderly and people with disabilities has a significant impact on health, independence and well-being. Food-insecure children often struggle to learn and thrive in school, may suffer developmental delays, and are more likely to be faced with behavior problems. 3Squares is a program that makes it easier for Vermonters to get the food they need and also helps the local economy.

One hundred thousand Vermonters, many of whom are adults or children with disabilities, currently receive 3SquaresVT food benefits. In fact, almost one half of all Vermont households receiving 3SquaresVT benefits include a person with a disability. Unfortunately, many of these households may not be getting the maximum benefit that they’re entitled to. Other households may not know they are eligible for 3SquaresVT.

Did you know that all seniors (age 60 or older) and people with disabilities can deduct their out-of-pocket medical expenses when applying for 3SquaresVT? Less than 20 percent of households that include a person with a disability are claiming their medical expenses. Claiming your medical expenses can greatly increase the monthly food benefit you get through 3SquaresVT. You can claim all monthly out-of-pocket medical expenses, including insurance co-pays, over-the-counter supplies and transportation costs to the doctor or pharmacy. If you think you might be eligible for benefits, it’s worth it to apply. Nine out of 10 households that include a person with a disability receive at least $50 or more in monthly benefits.

If you are a senior or person with a disability and currently receive 3SquaresVT but are not claiming your medical expenses, you can report your medical expenses at any time by calling 1-800-479-6151. To learn more about applying for 3SquaresVT or claiming your medical expenses visit www.vermontfoodhelp.com or call 2-1-1 for more information. Seniors and their families may also call the Senior HelpLine at 1-800-642-5119. There’s enough money for everyone who is eligible, so consider applying today!
Creative Workforce Solutions: The Road To Self-Sufficiency

Creative Workforce Solutions is an initiative of the Agency of Human Services that offers a consolidated and coordinated approach to employment services that provides equal access to meaningful work in the competitive job market for all AHS program participants. CWS offers the business community a simplified staffing service that helps them access qualified candidates. All services are free to businesses in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New York.

CWS employment consultants are available statewide to review business needs, offer qualified candidates and develop training plans that help prepare candidates for employment. The goal is to provide a streamlined recruitment and retention service for Vermont businesses while offering training and support to the many Vermonters who find entering, or re-entering, the workforce challenging. CWS offers many innovative ways to introduce employers to potential workers, and training programs can be designed to meet employers’ specific needs and are customized according to the skill level of the trainee. Many Vermonters have difficulty finding work due to a wide range of challenges. CWS works with individuals to identify their career goals, develop new skills and introduce them to employers in their community. Employers face increasing costs of recruitment and retention, and need a way to find good employees.

As an initiative of the Agency of Human Services, CWS works with any Vermonter being served by the agency including:

- Economic Services Division Reach Up participants: Individuals with dependent children who receive public benefits and who need skill building and training to become successfully employed.
- Department of Corrections: Ex-offenders exiting prison or under DOC supervision who need stable employment to successfully reintegrate into their communities.
- Department of Mental Health customers: Individuals with chronic mental illness who need supported employment that will reduce symptoms and increase productivity.
- Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living customers: Individuals with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, who need assistance and support to find and maintain employment.
- Vermont veterans: Many returning soldiers are looking to re-enter the workforce, yet have difficulty connecting to employers who can benefit from their skills.
- New Americans/refugees: Language and cultural differences present unique challenges for individuals who are newly settled in our communities.

By coordinating employment services, CWS reduces duplication of effort and provides quality services to individuals with multiple needs. CWS works closely with each employer to identify core skill requirements and to help develop the skills of candidates. For candidates who have been out of the workforce for an extended period, or for individuals who need to hone their skills, progressive employment can often be the bridge to employment that they need.

Progressive employment offers businesses an opportunity to meet a candidate and assess their skills prior to hiring them. During the training period, workers’ compensation and general liability insurances are provided by CWS, and the trainee receives a training offset rather than being on the employer’s payroll. Tax credits are also available to employers who hire certain Vermonters, including veterans. To learn more visit the CWS website: www.cwsvt.com
CWS Success Story

“Mark”

Mark is a man in his early 40s who had been on General Assistance benefits for nearly seven years. He was experiencing chronic lower back pain, knee pain, the effects of diabetes and depression. Mark had applied for Social Security disability benefits and been denied three times. When he came to the VR General Assistance program his plan for the future was to get by the best he could on GA and reapply for Social Security benefits. He felt that he was not capable of working and stated several times that employment was not in his future plans.

Mark’s career exploration activities indicated he would enjoy a job that involved interacting with people and also working with vehicles. He worked with his VR counselor and employment staff and “tried out” several work settings through company tours, informational interviews and a job shadow with an auto transportation company. He traveled to an auto auction and rode back in the truck carrying the purchased vehicles. Mark also participated in a work experience with an auto detailer. He found the work enjoyable and was able to share his concerns about his ability to do this type of work full time. Without realizing it, Mark was slowly making employment part of his future plans!

As a result of his CWS work experiences, Mark was hired as an auto transporter for a small private transportation company. He travels to auctions with his employer and drives vehicles back to the base. Because this was part-time and often sporadic depending on the season, Mark discussed doing detailing/reconditioning work with his new employer to supplement his hours. This has worked out well for Mark and his employer. He is no longer on GA benefits and is enjoying going to work each day. On his days off, he volunteers at a local nonprofit that his employer is connected to. He has lost weight and his health has improved. Mark is a wonderful example of the power of relationships and progressive employment. He has decided to not pursue another application for Social Security benefits. Mark believes that can wait until he retires.
The Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights presents our legislative platform for 2014. This summary highlights the legislative, policy and state budget issues VCDR is working on at the State House and with state officials. Rights and essential services needed by Vermonters with disabilities and their families must be preserved. This is the expectation that drives VCDR’s advocacy and public education activities and that will direct our work during the 2014 legislative session.

Want to help? VCDR sends legislative updates and alerts during the session and hundreds of Vermonters will be joining their legislators at the State House on Feb. 19 for Disability Awareness Day. Your participation then — and throughout the legislative session — is welcome and needed! Learn more at www.VCDR.org.

**POLICY BILLS**

**Civil Rights**

**Respectful Language Legislation Follow-up:** VCDR urges the Legislature to take the next step in the process and pass S.27 in order to amend Vermont statutes to refer to people with disabilities using respectful language. And we urge the Legislative Council and state agencies to insure that all policy drafting proceed in the spirit of the 2010 bill.

**Safeguarding Mental Health Rights and Protections:** VCDR will monitor and oppose legislative proposals that may diminish the civil rights of people with mental health issues, particularly those that might relate to forced treatment. Due process should not be compromised as new inpatient and community services are developed.

**Values and Quality Assurance in Developmental Services:** People with intellectual disabilities served by the Vermont’s developmental service system should be protected from abuse and neglect, have choices, and be able to fully participate in community life. The values of self-determination and community integration should be adhered to in related laws, regulations, policies and in the provision of services and supports. Twenty years after closing the Brandon Training School, we also need to rebuild our quality assurance infrastructure for developmental services.

**Individual and Family Engagement in Health Care Reform:** VCDR will monitor health care reform activities, especially the Vermont Blueprint for Health’s implementation in communities, to ensure that patients and family members are integral participants in their design, implementation and evaluation. VCDR will continue to monitor state and federal health care reform with the goal of ensuring that Vermont’s financing, service delivery and administrative practices benefit individuals with disabilities and their families and that related policies and practices ensure equal access and necessary rights protection for these Vermonters.

**Open Meetings:** VCDR supports efforts in H.440 that would extend the requirements of the Open Meeting Law to meetings of the governing boards and subcommittees of hospitals and Accountable Care Organizations. New ACOs will no doubt impact services for people with disabilities and there should be transparency within hospitals and ACOs when decisions are being made that affect our community.

**Palliative Care and Pain Management Task Force:** VCDR will monitor and follow the progress of H.237 to ensure that the bill treats people with disabilities equitably when mechanisms are set up to identify and empower surrogate decision makers. Access to

*Continued on next page*
protected health care information, right to consent issues, and admission to palliative and hospice care are among the potentially controversial issues.

Education

**Integrated Family Services:** VCDR will monitor the actual budget and policy actions being implemented under the Integrated Family Services initiative to ensure that IFS realizes its potential for family directed services that effectively and responsively meet children and families’ needs. Family and youth engagement is needed in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the changes.

**Seclusion & Restraint in Vermont Schools:** Vermont should ensure enforcement of Agency of Education Rule 4500 regulating the use of restraint and seclusion in Vermont schools. All students with disabilities must be protected and positive behavioral supports provided.

**State Education Agency:** The Legislature should monitor Vermont’s State Education Agency as it transitions from a department with a commissioner reporting to a statewide board to an agency with a secretary that reports to the governor. The departments in SEA that are responsible for the enforcement and implementation of the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 must be appropriately staffed and supported through this transition and afforded a significant role within the agency. We ask that the Legislature monitor the SEA to ensure that the voices of families and youth with disabilities are included throughout the transition and on an ongoing basis as decisions are made that will ultimately impact them directly.

**Common Core Standards:** VCDR recommends that the Legislature monitor the State Education Agency and Local Education Agencies during Vermont’s transition to the Common Core Standards. The purpose of this monitoring is to ensure that there is appropriate planning and preparation to implement the Common Core with all students, including students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should be included in this new general education curriculum and given appropriate support to ensure that they are able to achieve their maximum potential.

**MEDICAID & BUDGET**

“People First” Budget: VCDR agrees with the “People’s Budget Campaign” that people have a right to healthcare, education, housing, and dignified work. Yet our state is cutting necessary public services and public jobs, instead of raising new revenue. We join other Vermonters demanding a say in how our state raises and spends our tax dollars. Our leaders should understand and manage to the need, rather than simply managing to current revenue.

**Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Medicaid:** The state should review funding levels for mandated EPSDT services (including case management, rehabilitative therapies, and transportation and family van modifications) for Vermont’s Medicaid eligible children.

**Family Funding & CSHN Respite:** VCDR requests level or increased funding for respite services for families provided through Developmental Services Flexible Family Funding, the Department of Health/Children with Special Health Needs Respite Program, the Children’s Mental Health Respite Program, the Children’s Personal Care Services Programs, and/or any other programs.

**Children’s Integrated Services:** In order to ensure that children receive services guaranteed by federal and state law, VCDR proposes that Vermont appropriate an additional $1.5 million to the Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division for Part C services under Children’s Integrated Services; and that additional money be appropriated to the Agency of Human Services to increase access to EPSDT services.
VCDR also proposes that Vermont include CIS and EPSDT services in the planning and implementation of Vermont’s single-payer insurance system and require CIS representation on all Community Health Teams. Our full platform document highlights related recommendations, including a proposal that Building Bright Futures, the Agency of Human Services and the Agency of Education work together to expand early intervention and early childhood special services, enhance staffing of these programs, and ensure effective evaluation, interagency coordination and input from community programs as rule changes occur.

**Long-Term Care and Supports:** A realistic level of long-term supports must be available to those with serious needs. This includes developmental services, especially those oriented toward transition to adulthood. Most people don’t realize that only about 25 percent of the people who have developmental disabilities get services. Each year about 100 new people come into the system because of some crisis in their life, like homelessness, the death of a parent, or abuse. And once they come into the system they likely will need services for the rest of their lives. Services for people with serious mental health issues need to be robust so that, with other people with disabilities, they can have equal access to the opportunity to participate in all aspects of society.

**Work Incentives:** The administration and the Legislature should expand Vermont’s work incentive benefits, including expanding eligibility and asset protections in Vermont’s Medicaid for Working People with Disabilities Program, to encourage more people with disabilities to participate in the workforce. Employment initiatives should be part of the State Innovation Model and the Community Rehabilitation & Treatment Program since it has been shown that people who are employed and productive are healthier and lower the overall cost of health care.

**SERVICES & NEW INITIATIVES**

**Support for Peer Initiatives:** The state should continue and expand support for peer initiatives and organizations like Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, Green Mountain Self-Advocates, Another Way Drop-in Center, and Alyssum. These, and projects like the “Soteria House” currently being developed, build on the life experience and wisdom of people with disabilities.

**Peer Navigation for Families with Complex Needs:** Vermont should reinstate this program in which people with the lived experience of complex needs in their own families assisted other families to find their way through the complex system of social, economic and health programs. Formerly federally funded for six years (Family Support 360 Project), peer navigation has a documented record of success in supporting more informed choices and positive outcomes for families with children and/or parents with disabilities.

**Support Service Providers for DeafBlind Individuals:** VCDR is requesting that $60,000 for SSP services be included in the DAIL budget. We believe that SSPs, individuals who are trained to act as links between persons who are DeafBlind and their environment, are essential to support the independence and community participation of individuals who are DeafBlind and other Vermonters with dual sensory loss. The Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has received funding for initial administrative costs and the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired has helped to train people to provide this service, but cannot provide direct services funding to the many Vermonters who would benefit.

**The Sue Williams Freedom Fund:** VCDR supports this long-standing VCIL initiative to provide grant assistance, unavailable through medical insurance, for people with disabilities in need of services, adaptive equipment and equipment necessary to live independently in their own homes. VCDR asks the state to augment VCIL’s program with $67,500 to serve the 45 people currently on their waiting list.
Emergency Housing Needs for People With Disabilities: Last year the Department for Children and Families’ EA/GA Temporary Housing Program was dramatically cut. This eliminated DCF funding for emergency motel housing for many people with disabilities, families with children and young people aging out of DCF foster care. Individuals with disabilities who are not current Social Security recipients are no longer eligible. VCDR asks that the Legislature increase the funding to ensure that the most minimal emergency housing needs are met and that rules be changed so that assistance is not categorically denied to individuals with disabilities not receiving Supplemental Security Income or SSDI.

Insurance Coverage for Hearing Aids: Private insurance should be required to provide some reasonable level of coverage for hearing aids.

Affordable and Accessible Housing: VCDR will support efforts to expand Vermont’s available stock of affordable and accessible housing. This requires legislative support for increasing the number of appropriate rental and purchase units, and for regulation that prohibits credit scoring bias. These services also require related state support for developers, housing authorities, and private landlords.

Transportation: VCDR will support efforts to expand Vermont’s public transportation options, including a unified (statewide) approach to sub-contracting and support for both medical and non-medical needs. This requires legislative support to unify the varied regional contracts and to regulate the criteria for use and public support.

Van Modification: Funding of approximately $424,000 should be provided to assist families with expenses related to modifying a van or other vehicle to make the vehicle accessible to children whose medical condition requires adaptive equipment and/or a wheelchair.

Parking Placard Statute Update: VCDR supports updating Vermont’s parking placard statute to clarify that individuals transporting a person with a valid placard have the same rights as the individual with the disability would have if she or he were driving the vehicle.

VCDR thanks the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, VCDR members and friends for their contributions and support of our work. For more information about particular bills and other VCDR advocacy activities, contact us:

11 East State St., Montpelier, VT 05602
e-mail: vcdrvt@gmail.com
on the web: www.VCDR.org

Vermont Coalition For Disability Rights Gears Up For Disability Awareness Day

VCDR is busily preparing for Disability Awareness Day, which will be held at the State House on Feb. 19 from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The theme of this year’s event is “Empower People with Disabilities: It’s Only Right(s).” The keynote speaker will be Chester A. Finn, a Special Assistant in the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. He is also the co-founder of Community Empowerment Programs Inc., which provides community services and educational programming for people with disabilities.

The Day At A Glance

9 to 10 — Register and grab a cup of joe.
9:30 to 4 — Attend workshops to get updates and talking points from VCDR members on hot topics.
11 — Attend a press conference room about employment for people with disabilities.
Noon — Make an appointment to have lunch with your legislator. Pizza will be served in Room 10 at 1 p.m.
1 — Disability Awareness Day will be announced on the House floor.
4:30 to 6:30 — Appetizers will be served in the cafeteria. Keynote and panel discussion about empowering people with disabilities.
COVE’s 2014 Legislative Priorities

COVE’s mission is to promote and protect a higher quality of life for Vermont’s elders, through education and advocacy. The needs, concerns, safety and well-being of elders who are economically disadvantaged, physically or mentally challenged, or geographically, or socially isolated, are a central focus of our public policy work.

The State Budget: Ensure adequate state funding and discounted fuel prices in the LIHEAP Fuel Assistance; achieve reinvestment of savings for unmet needs in Vermont’s Choices for Care program; and continue our efforts to get premiums reduced or eliminated for Vermonters in VPharm 1. Additional information on these budget items is provided later in this summary.

Adult Protective Services: Monitor legislation to ensure current law remains strong.

Three Squares Vermont: Work with the administration and Legislature to reduce time it takes to process elder applications; reduce error rate that result in incorrect benefits and ongoing fines for the state of Vermont.

Transportation: Monitor legislation involving public, Medicaid, and elderly and disabled transportation programs; advocate for more funding to meet continued unmet needs of vulnerable adults.

Health Care Reform & Medicaid ACOs: Advocate for involvement of long-term care providers and vulnerable adults in all remaining stages of Vermont’s health care reform and for preservation and safeguards for Vermont’s long-term care services and supports.

Kinship Caregivers: Monitor legislation affecting grandparents raising grandchildren.

The Exchange/Health Care Reform: Monitor progress toward including Medicare Supplemental Plans on the exchange; monitor financing proposals for single payer and how they will affect working people on Medicare; monitor the development of Medicaid ACO and their potential impact on Vermont elders and individuals with disabilities.

Specific Priority Bills

H.208, Earned Sick Leave: COVE supports this legislation to require that employees accumulate up to seven sick days and allows them to use the time to care for a sick child or grandchild they are raising, or parent.

H.301, Training needs for direct care workers: COVE supports this bill as part of the Quality Care No Matter Where Coalition, to set up a task force to assess the training needs of direct care workers who provide home and community-based services through Medicaid.

S.27, Respectful Language in Vermont statutes: COVE supports this legislation, a priority of the disability community, to remove outdated statutory language for people with disabilities and elders and replace it with respectful language.

S.35, Licensed dental practitioners: COVE supports this bill as part of the Oral Health for All Vermonters Coalition, to increase access for Vermonters to affordable oral health care by creating a program for a new, mid-level licensed dental practitioner.

Bill for which AARP is taking the lead: H.154, Vision and road testing for older drivers. COVE opposes this bill (as does AARP) and any other arbitrary legislation based solely on age. We remain open to discussing how to improve highway safety, an issue of concern to all of us.

Additional Information

LIHEAP Fuel Assistance: The federal LIHEAP provides assistance paying for home heating for people of all ages whose household income does not exceed 150 percent of the federal poverty level. The state has supplemented federal funds since those funds were cut, and the 2014 state budget included $6 million for LIHEAP. COVE is working hard to make sure that the additional (roughly) $2.1 million in funds needed for 2014 are appropriated. While LIHEAP benefits Vermonters of all ages, it is important to note that 29 percent of households receiving seasonal benefits include someone 60 or older.
**Choices for Care:** CFC is Vermont’s long-term care program for low- to moderate-income elders and adults with disabilities. It provides for both nursing home and community-based care. Language in last year’s budget no longer allows the state to use savings from this program for anything other than new long-term care services. COVE is advocating for full reinvestment of CFC savings — about $6 million — into home and community-based services, including services for Vermonters with moderate needs, as these individuals often go without needed assistance.

**VPharm Pharmaceutical Assistance Program:** VPharm is the state program for elders under 225 percent of poverty that helps 12,000 elders with their Medicare Part D premiums and all other out-of-pocket drug expenses not otherwise covered by Medicare — deductibles, co-pays and coinsurance. In 2012, COVE discovered that the premiums paid by program recipients ($15 to $50 a month) are almost as much as the overall benefits they get from the program. In fact, elders on VPharm 1 (those under 150 percent of poverty) receive very little in benefits through this program — on average, less than $10 a month. COVE wants the state to reduce or eliminate premiums in VPharm 1. The federal government has covered more and more of the cost of Medicare Part D, and after drug company rebates, the program costs the state next to nothing — if they are not actually making money from it.

**Health Care Reform & Medicaid Accountable Care Organizations:** An ACO is a provider-run entity that encourages collaboration within a participating group of doctors, hospitals and other providers to reduce health care costs. If the ACO can reduce its costs below a projected benchmark, and meet quality control measures, it will be allowed to keep some percentage of those savings, and the payer (the government, as the insurer in the Medicare/Medicaid context) keeps the rest. Two Medicare ACOs formed in 2012 under the federal Affordable Care Act, and a third one submitted a proposal to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid in 2013. These groups have also responded to the Department of Vermont Health Access’ request for proposals to operate as state Medicaid ACOs.

The initial Medicaid ACO planning process included parties involved in acute care, but not long-term care. Though LTC services are not expected to be included in the “total cost of care” for which Medicaid ACOs are responsible for the first year, contracts negotiations are under way that could substantially affect Vermont’s LTC services system. COVE and Vermont Legal Aid successfully advocated that ACOs must establish consumer advisory committees and include consumers on their boards. We continue to advocate for the protection of aging and disability services in health care reform and for effective oversight and preservation of long-term services and supports in the development of any Medicaid ACOs in Vermont.

**Adult Protective Services:** APS investigates reports of abuse, neglect or exploitation of vulnerable adults, and if the reports are substantiated, can take steps to protect the victim and put the perpetrator on the adult abuse registry to ensure that person cannot get another job working with vulnerable adults. There are statutory requirements as to how much time is allowed for opening an investigation and notifying the reporter and victim of progress, etc. For several years COVE has questioned the adequacy and statutory compliance of Vermont’s APS program. When informal discussions broke down, COVE, Disability Rights Vermont and two Area Agencies on Aging sued the state to force compliance with the law. The lawsuit, settled in August, resulted in significant improvements and greater attention by the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. COVE will continue to monitor APS activities and looks forward to continued collaboration with both DAIL and its APS division.

For a more in-depth summary and updates on COVE’s policy work this session, contact:

**Community of Vermont Elders**

Building a Safe Harbor for Vermont Elders through Advocacy and Education
P.O. Box 1276
Montpelier, VT 05602
802-229-4731; cove@vermontelders.org
www.vermontelders.org
DISABILITY RIGHTS VERMONT ANNOUNCES FY2014 PRIORITIES

Disability Rights Vermont is a private nonprofit agency dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of people with mental health and disability issues. We are empowered (and funded) by the federal government to investigate abuse, neglect and serious rights violations. Our 15-member staff teams with the nine-member staff of the Disability Law Project of Vermont Legal Aid to create the cross-disability legal protection and advocacy system for Vermont. This past year DRVT and the DLP were busy defending the rights of people with disabilities both in individual case work and in systemic change.

DRVT is once again publishing the priorities approved by our board for the current fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2013 – Sept. 30, 2014.) We welcome your thoughts about how our unique system can best serve people with disabilities and mental health issues. DRVT is publishing our formal priorities for the Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program, the Protection & Advocacy for Developmental Disabilities (PADD), and the Protection & Advocacy for Individual Rights (PAIR) programs on the adjoining pages. These priorities serve to focus the work of the agency and are developed by our board and our advisory councils, who get input from the community and staff. Your input is appreciated! We strive to do as much as we can with the resources we have … and we can do that best when folks in the community let us know their greatest advocacy needs.

To help us stay connected to the community we serve, send us your comments at: info@disabilityrightsvt.org or to DRVT, 141 Main Street, Suite 7, Montpelier, VT 05602
Or by phone: 1-800-834-7890 or, locally, at (802) 229-1355
And please visit our website at www.disabilityrightsvt.org

2014 PRIORITIES FOR PROTECTION & ADVOCACY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS (PAIMI)

Priority 1: Investigate individual cases of abuse, neglect, and serious rights violations in inpatient facilities (designated hospitals, any state run facilities, designated agencies, emergency rooms, facilities for minors), prisons/jails, and community settings, including peer services.

Priority 2: Reduce the use of seclusion, restraint, coercion and involuntary procedures through systemic efforts. Continue systemic work to create culturally competent, trauma-informed, violence free and coercion free mental health treatment environments.

Priority 3: Reach out to community settings, designated facilities, emergency rooms, prisons/jails, residential and therapeutic care homes. Monitor conditions and educate residents about rights and self-advocacy. Engage in systems work to improve

Priority 4: Advocate for self-determination and access to alternative treatment options and community integration. Use legal advocacy to enforce and expand rights across the State of Vermont.

2014 PRIORITIES FOR PROTECTION & ADVOCACY FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (PADD)

Health Priority Area

- People with disabilities have access to needed health care/long term care; children with developmental disabilities and/or mental health needs will receive needed services and supports.

Education Priority Area

- Students with disabilities are not harassed, are not subjected to Restrictive Behavior Interventions, and are not unlawfully disciplined, suspended or expelled from their educational program. Students with disabilities receive an

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appropriate transition from school to employment and independent living. Resources permitting: Students with disabilities are identified, evaluated, and receive a free and appropriate public education and related services. Federal and Vermont entitlements and procedural protections are preserved.

Quality Assurance Priority Area

• Olmstead: People with disabilities have access to appropriate services/supports in the least restrictive, and most integrated, settings.
• Children in institutional and other residential and alternative educational settings will receive protection and advocacy services.
• Access to developmental services for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
• Guardianship: Protection of legal rights in guardianship proceedings. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities do not have unnecessary guardianships.
• SSI: Access to and preservation of SSI benefits for income eligible children under age 18 or turning 18 whose benefits are terminated on the basis of disability. Maintain maximum SS benefits for adults who are disabled and working.
• Title II ADA: Increased accommodations for people with disabilities in government services, including state and local emergency services.
• Title III ADA: Individuals with disabilities will have increased access to businesses open to the public.
• Communication Support Project (Joint priority with DDC and UCE).
• Self Determination: People with disabilities make meaningful and informed choices about their services and supports.
• Abuse Neglect & Exploitation: Adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities living independently, in institutions, or in parental, family, group or developmental homes, are free from abuse, neglect or rights violations.

Housing Priority Area

• People with disabilities receive needed accommodations in housing and are not discriminated against in housing.

Employment Priority Area

• People with disabilities will not be discriminated against in hiring, employment and advancement.

Transportation Priority Area

• People with disabilities have access to accessible transportation.

Parenting Priority Area

• Parents with disabilities have access to appropriate services/supports that promote family preservation/reunification.

2014 PRIORITIES FOR PROTECTION & ADVOCACY FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS (PAIR)
(This program serves people with disabilities other than those served by PAIMI & PADD.)

Health Priority Area

• People with disabilities have access to needed health care/long term care; children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or mental health needs will receive needed services and supports.

Quality Assurance Priority Area

• Olmstead: People with disabilities have access to appropriate services/supports in the least restrictive and most integrated settings.
• Guardianship: Protection of legal rights in guardianship proceedings. People with disabilities do not have unnecessary guardianships.
• Maintain maximum SS benefits for adults who are disabled and working.
• Title II ADA: Increased accommodations for people with disabilities in government services, higher education, Reach Up, judicial and corrections systems — including people with disabilities who have been victims of crime, and parents with disabilities in the child protection system.
• Title III ADA: Individuals with disabilities will have increased access to businesses open to the public.
• Communication Support Project (Joint priority with DDC and UCE) People with intellectual and

Continued on Page 22
Vt. Seeks To Revitalize Developmental Disabilities Act Of 1996

In partnership with Green Mountain Self-Advocates, the Disability Law Project and the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights, the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council is spearheading an effort to update the enabling legislation for Vermont’s community-based system for individuals with developmental disabilities. H. 728, sponsored by Rep. Patsy French (D-Randolph) and Rep. Anne Donahue (D-Northfield), proposes the first significant revisions to the act [18 V.S.A. § 8721 et. seq.] since it was adopted in 1996 following the closing of the Brandon Training School.

The proposed changes focus on improving quality assurance and increasing legislative oversight for a System of Care Plan that represents $171 million annually in state and federal dollars. Advocates emphasize that the Principles of Service laid out in the act [§ 8724] remain at the heart of the statute and the values-based system it set in place. (See Page 22 to read the Principles of Service.) However, a decade of administrative cuts and tighter eligibility criteria threaten the system’s capacity to realize that vision. H.728 would also align the intent of the act with federal law, framing opportunities for community participation as a “right.”

Proposed Revisions to the Act

CLARIFY AND STRENGTHEN ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

In partnership with individuals and families supported by the Developmental Services System, the Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living must take a proactive approach in identifying key indicators of high quality service, measuring services in light of those standards, and taking corrective action as needed [§ 8723].

PROVIDE FOR APPROPRIATE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT

Currently, the act exempts the Developmental Services System of Care Plan from Vermont’s Administrative Procedures Act [§ 8725]. In the critical matter of determining who will receive support and what services will be funded, legislative oversight is a necessary final step. Review should be similar in approach and frequency to other Medicaid-funded programs.

CLOSE THE LOOP BETWEEN NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ANNUAL REPORTING

The act requires that the Developmental Services System of Care Plan be developed in light of a “comprehensive needs assessment” [§ 8725(b)]. Annual updates should assess implementation of the plan in terms of these identified needs, as well as the Principles of Service outlined in the act. Without this provision, the agency will no longer be required to update lawmakers [2 V.S.A. §20].

ADOPT LANGUAGE CONSISTENT WITH THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

As set out by the ADA, Vermont citizens should have “a right” to the opportunities outlined in the purpose clause of the act [§ 8721]. The term “intellectual disability” is preferred [§ 8722]. The phrase “within the limits of available resources” should be removed, as it does not appear in other statutes that guide similar systems of care [§ 8723 and § 8725(b)].
Principles of Service
(V.S.A. Sec. 8724, abbreviated)

**Adult services.** Adults, regardless of the severity of their disability, can make decisions for themselves, can live in typical homes, and can contribute as citizens in the communities in which they live.

**Children’s services.** Children, regardless of the severity of their disability, need families and enduring relationships with adults in a nurturing home environment.

**Individualized support.** To be effective and efficient, services must be individualized to the capacities, needs, and values of each individual.

**Full information.** People with developmental disabilities and their families need complete information about the availability, choices, and costs of services, how the decision making process works and how to participate in that process.

**Family support.** Effective family support services shall be designed and provided with respect and responsiveness to the unique needs, strengths and cultural values of each family and the family’s expertise regarding its own needs.

**Meaningful choices.** Effective services shall be flexible so they can be individualized to support and accommodate personalized choices, values, and needs and assure that each recipient is directly involved in decisions that affect their life.

**Community participation.** When people with disabilities are segregated from community life, all Vermonters are diminished.

**Employment.** The goal of job support is to obtain and maintain paid employment in regular employment settings.

**Health and safety.** The safety and health of people with developmental disabilities is of paramount concern.

**Accessibility.** Services must be geographically available.

**Trained staff.** All individuals who provide services to people with developmental disabilities and their families must receive training as required by Section 8731 of this title.

**Fiscal integrity.** The fiscal stability of the service system is dependent upon skillful and frugal management and sufficient resources to meet the needs of Vermonters with developmental disabilities.

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This portrait by Union Elementary student Ella Darcy is just one example of a recent art project that aimed to help children understand all the ways that people with disabilities enhance our community. For more about the project, see Page 5.

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Continued from Page 20 (DRVT)

developmental disabilities receive communication support in judicial and other proceedings.

- **Abuse Neglect & Exploitation:** Adults and children with disabilities living independently, institutions, or in parental, family, group or developmental homes, are free from abuse, neglect or rights violations.

**Housing Priority Area**

- People with disabilities receive needed accommodations in housing.

**Employment Priority Area**

- People with disabilities will not be discriminated against in hiring, employment and advancement.

**Transportation Priority Area**

- People with disabilities have access to accessible transportation.

**Parenting Priority Area**

- Parents with disabilities have access to appropriate services/supports that promote family preservation/reunification.
got access?
by Kim Brittenham

Got Bullying?

Students with disabilities are bullied in our schools and regularly account for the second highest number of school bullying complaints received by the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

VCIL is addressing bullying as part of the Agency of Education Advisory Council on Hazing, Harassment and Bullying which was formed by legislative order in 2012. The overall objective of the 17-member Advisory Council is to review and coordinate school and statewide activities relating to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing and bullying.

A recent “Listening Tour” of five schools — Winoo ski, Newport, Hartford, Brattleboro and Brandon — allowed the council to hear directly from students about what is happening in their schools, what is working and not working to address hazing, harassment and bullying, and what adults can do differently to improve how we respond to and address these kinds of incidents.

Students shared their painful stories of administration and adults not responding to their individual victimizations and their frustration with lack of accountability. Students also told council members they wanted schools with welcoming environments where they felt they belonged. They wanted opportunities to understand each other’s differences and learn how to be good mentors.

The opinions of students with disabilities on bullying and harassment did not differ from the rest, yet the additional isolation some experience intensifies the impact of bullying and can have even more devastating results. Students who are not intrinsically woven into their school’s social fabric often feel isolated when they are taught one-on-one by an individual assistant outside the classroom, have to ride the “little bus” alone with adults (also a vulnerable place for abuse), or routinely face locked wheelchair accessible entrances due to heightened school security systems. When contact with fellow students is reduced and bullying happens during those infrequent social interactions, the result can be soul-crushing.

As a result of student input, VCIL will continue to support the SILC’s INCLUDE! curriculum being used by individual schools in an effort to create welcoming, inclusive positive school climates for students with disabilities. (See Page 5 of this issue to read about a student art show.) The council’s future work includes its annual listening tour, an information and resource clearinghouse for schools, collection and analysis of information about bullying, harassment, and school climate, and designing professional development opportunities and new resources for schools.


The council meets every other month in the Central Vermont area and is open to the public. To learn more about the council, attend a meeting, or get a copy of the Council’s 2013 Report to the Legislature or the “Listening Tour” summary of key findings, visit the Agency of Education via website:

http://education.vermont.gov/bullying-prevention-council

Or contact Council Chair Tracey Tsugawa of the Vermont Human Rights Commission at (802) 828-2493 or tracey.tsugawa@state.vt.us

VCIL’s Community Access Program works to improve access to buildings, services and programs as Vermont’s ADA technical assistance and training provider [through a grant from the National Institute of Rehabilitation and Research (NIDRR)]. For more information, contact the Community Access Program: 1-800-639-1522 (Voice/TTY) or visit: http://www.vcil.org.
Disability Awareness Day

“Empower People with Disabilities: It’s Only Right(s)”
Feb. 19, 2014, at the State House
See Page 16 for details

Join the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights in celebrating and speaking up for disability rights and services. Take the opportunity to talk to your legislators, participate in a workshop and enjoy the wisdom of keynote speaker Chester Finn. For more information or to register, contact Stefanie Monte at smonte@vcil.org or 802-224-1820.

ReCycle Catalog

VCIL maintains a ReCycle Catalog, a listing of used disability equipment that people are seeking and disability equipment that is for sale. To receive a copy of the catalog or to list an item, contact Ericka Reil at 802-224-1824, or visit us online at http://www.vcil.org/resources/recycle-catalog

Accessible Adventures Await

Do you know of a local business with great wheelchair access or Brailled menus? Let your peers know about it on Accessible Adventures. Thanks to the Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council, anyone can submit their own reviews of restaurants, stores, theaters and recreation areas by visiting www.accessibleadventuresvt.org.

To find out about other disability or senior programs and activities, contact VCIL at 1-800-639-1522 or the Senior Helpline at 1-800-642-5119

For information on the next issue, email smonte@vcil.org or call 1-800-639-1522