

# THE MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

## HIGHLIGHTS 2000

### Year 2000 in Review

- Family NET Works grants provide outreach to underserved communities throughout Maryland
- Important legislation extends educational services to students transitioning to adult services
- More than 100 people with disabilities purchase their first homes
- Council grants develop innovative, inclusive solutions to issues facing people with developmental disabilities and their families

## FAMILY NET WORKS *Family-Centered and Family Directed*

This year, the Council spearheaded a special family support project called Family NET Works. This family-centered and family-directed project focused on: improving and increasing supports and services available to Maryland families that have a child with a developmental disability; increasing families' knowledge and understanding of a wide range of family supports and; reaching families that have traditionally been underserved, especially those who are from cultural or linguistic minority backgrounds and those who are new to Maryland.

Family NET Works is developing an interactive, family-friendly website that will include extensive resources, a bulletin board for sharing information, and a chat room where shared issues and concerns can be explored through thought-provoking discussions.

Family NET Works awarded mini-grants that outreached to diverse communities and supported inclusion. These projects have already had an impact: developing a curriculum for inclusive before and after school programs; outreach to parents who primarily speak Spanish or Korean; translation of materials into other languages; developing a website in Korean; and training Orthodox Jewish camp counselors about disabilities and preparing teens to provide respite care in Orthodox homes.

Family NET Works is exploring ways to expand funding for family support and identifying changes that are needed in policies and practices to improve quality and access. The Council is dedicated to improving families' access to needed information, resources, peer support, and quality services and supports that they choose and direct. Family NET Works is at the heart of this commitment, and this exciting work will continue throughout 2001.

## Education *Promoting Inclusion in Education Policy*

The Council continued to work actively on several fronts to address the low rate of inclusion of students with developmental disabilities in Maryland schools. Compared to other states, Maryland continues to rank poorly for its inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. In collaboration with other advocates, the Council provided testimony resulting in the legislature requiring the Maryland State Department of Education to examine ways to reduce the number of students placed in non-public schools. Through Council representation on the State Interagency Coordinating Council and statewide committees and coalitions, legislative and policy changes were made to improve special education.

During the 2000 legislative session the Council worked with the Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities to see passage of a law extending eligibility for special education and related services to the end of the school year in which the student turns 21 years of age. Previously some students who turned age 21 during the first half of the school year had to leave at the end of the semester. Families of students forced to leave the school system mid year reported greater difficulties in transitioning into the adult service systems, including longer periods without services in place.

In the Fall of 1999 and into 2000, the Council worked with parent and advocacy groups to provide information to the Federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) during its monitoring of Maryland's special education system. Following a workshop on special education monitoring done in collaboration with The Parents' Place of Maryland, 450 family members came out to several public hearings across Maryland and voiced their concerns about special education services in the State.

## Transportation *Getting There*

Fixed route and paratransit transportation services for people with disabilities are inadequate throughout Maryland. Frequently, people with disabilities do not have transportation to employment, health care appointments, or to socialize with family and friends. Even if transportation is available, people may wait for hours for their ride, or necessary equipment may fail. Individuals with disabilities need reliable public transportation to be contributing members of society.

In response to these difficult issues, the Council awarded two grants to expand the availability and accessibility of public transportation for people with disabilities in Montgomery and Wicomico counties. Council staff examined regional planning, outreach, and long range planning issues relative to transportation through participation on several task forces and coalitions.

## Olmstead

### *A Right to Life in the Community*

In the case of *Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W.*, the US Supreme Court found that unjustified isolation and segregation of people with disabilities in institutions is discrimination. Denial of community placements to individuals with disabilities is precisely the kind of segregation Congress intended to eliminate through passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Court affirmed the rights of individuals with disabilities to receive benefits and services “in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.”

In July 2000, Governor Glendening signed an Executive Order creating the Community Access Steering Committee and Task Forces to develop Maryland’s comprehensive plan to expand community-based services for individuals with disabilities living in institutional settings. This includes people with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and physical disabilities.

The Council actively participates on the Task Forces created by the Governor’s Executive Order, with a particular focus on issues and barriers facing people with developmental disabilities and the cross-cutting issue of affordable, accessible housing. The Council works in collaboration with the Coalition for Civil Rights of People with Disabilities to hold the State responsible for compliance with the Supreme Court’s *Olmstead* decision and is urging full funding of the *Movement to Community* report which outlines beginning steps. Much more needs to be done to assure individuals with disabilities have the right to life in the community.

## Homes

### *There’s No Place Like Home*

In 2000, the Council, leading the Home of Your Own Coalition, worked collaboratively with the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to continue the Home Ownership for Individuals with Disabilities Program. The Program provides low interest rate mortgages for individuals with disabilities who have low incomes and cannot qualify for other public or private mortgage programs. In its third year as a demonstration project, this program has provided a total of \$8.2 million in mortgage funds and helped approximately 120 individuals with disabilities to access the American dream of homeownership for the very first time.

Most people with significant disabilities and low-incomes could not afford to buy a home without the Home Ownership for Individuals with Disabilities Program. This unique program makes purchasing a home affordable by providing a range of interest rates and accepting low down-payments and various means of demonstrating credit worthiness.

The Council, in partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Administration, and Mental Hygiene Administration, funded the Maryland Center for Community Development to train housing counselors throughout the state, provide information and referral services, educate realtors and lenders, and work with private lenders to reach people with disabilities.

During the course of the year the Council worked on a number of other fronts to increase the availability of affordable, accessible housing for people with developmental disabilities. We provided input into the state’s comprehensive housing plan, helped guide a local project developing self-determined rental and homeownership opportunities, and provided technical assistance and education to a variety of stakeholders regarding housing issues, concerns and solutions.

## Health

### *Expanding and Improving Access*

Access to appropriate healthcare is critical for everyone. This year, the Council and other child advocacy groups successfully advocated for the expansion of the Maryland Children’s Health Program to thousands of new children and pregnant women throughout the State. Collaborative advocacy also led to legislation that maximizes consumers’ choice over their primary care provider and Managed Care Organization and expands services to children with congenital disabilities and health issues.

The Council continued to play a role in policy development through service on the Maryland Medicaid Advisory Committee and Special Needs Advisory Committee. The Council has focused on the particular health care concerns of individuals with disabilities and other “special” needs and will continue this focus in the coming year.

# Council Projects

## Education

Through **Connections- Fostering Inclusion in General Education Classrooms & Extracurricular Activities** (*Allegany County Schools*) more students with developmental disabilities who use assistive technology received services in general education classrooms. The project has developed curriculum adaptations, designed a systemic way for students to access assistive technology services, and enabled staff to integrate assistive technology solutions into their classroom.

The **Coalition for Inclusive Education Opportunities** (*Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education*) project supported parents in Maryland who seek inclusive educational opportunities for their children who have disabilities to be educated in neighborhood schools. MCIE promotes inclusive educational programs and services through administrative advocacy at the federal, state and local level, community organizing, individual advocacy, and information dissemination about inclusive services and best and promising practices. Since its inception, MCIE has assisted over 3,000 families throughout the state of Maryland.

## Community Inclusion

The **Building Foundations** (*PACT*) project provided services to parents with cognitive disabilities and their children. The goals of the program are (1) to keep families headed by parents with cognitive disabilities together by teaching effective parenting and independent living skills; (2) to help the children in these families stay developmentally on target; and (3) to expand and enhance available support by providing home-based services and assisting with the coordination of services.

The **Parent to Parent Network** (*The Arc of Montgomery County*) established a mentor program between more experienced parents and younger families. This creates an opportunity for experienced parents to provide support and share resources with parents who may benefit greatly from the experience of others raising a child with a disability. This year focused on: increased parent participation in all aspects of the program; training sessions and mentor support; marketing of the program to multicultural communities; and increasing matches made in all disability areas. These goals were reached through coordination of a social gathering where mentors and families could meet as a group; a “train the trainer session” for mentors participating in the program; and greater choice provided to new parents in relation to the matching process.

## Employment

The services offered through **Benefits INfoSource** (*Independence Now*) promote the use of Social Security Work Incentives in Maryland. Benefits INfoSource offers a toll-free statewide assistance line to provide information concerning work incentives and other benefits issues. Other services offered are: referral to work incentive developers on a fee-for-service basis; training provided to individuals and groups about work incentives; and technical assistance to encourage the use of work incentives.

# Council Projects

## Self Determination

The **AHAVA** (*Jewish Family Service*) project helped the Orthodox Jewish community in Baltimore to develop and implement a shared vision of an inclusive community for people with developmental disabilities. A community that is geographically concentrated, and bound by language, cultural, ritual, and social affinities often requires special attention in the areas of trust, religious and cultural values, and accepting change. The AHAVA project provided education regarding available services and how to access them and the necessities of appropriate financial planning. Individualized support plans were created for people who were at the greatest risk.

**Partners in Policymaking**, is a joint project of the *Council, The Arc of Maryland, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program/Family Support Network*. Partners in Policymaking provided leadership training for parents of young children with significant disabilities and people with developmental disabilities so that they become skilled systems change advocates. The overall goal of Partners in Policymaking is to develop productive partnerships between people who need and use services and those in a position to affect policy and law. Participants are provided with information about state-of-the-art resources in special education, best practices in fostering independence, community inclusion, state and federal legislation, and community organizing.

The **Campaign for Freedom** (*People on the Go of Maryland*) assisted self-advocates to build and use their advocacy skills to help people move out of institutions so they can live in the community. Self advocates met with legislators and spoke about the importance of living free in the community, and held a Freedom Rally to get their message out. People on the Go conducted a Leadership Retreat, a Statewide Self-Advocacy Conference and Legislative Reception to network and coordinate advocacy efforts.

The **Evaluation of Maryland's Self-Determination Initiative** took a critical look at the outcomes and lessons learned through the state's initiative to promote self-determination. *The Human Services Research Institute* conducted an examination of system-level and individual level changes stemming from the Initiative. *People On the Go* and *The Arc of Maryland* conducted consumer satisfaction interviews with Initiative participants using the Ask Me! survey. The results will assist in promoting changes so that people with developmental disabilities and their families have greater choice and control over the services and supports they receive.

## Housing

**Expanding Home Ownership Opportunities** (*Maryland Center for Community Development*) is a collaborative project funded by the Council, Mental Hygiene Administration, and Developmental Disabilities Administration. This project is designed to expand homeownership opportunities for people with disabilities through the education of housing professionals and Real Estate agents, outreach and education about housing options for people with disabilities, research of best practices, identification of barriers to home ownership, and the development of public policy recommendations and solutions.

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## Council Mission



***The Maryland Developmental Disabilities  
Council advocates for public policy and  
supportive practices and opportunities that  
promote the full inclusion of all people with  
developmental disabilities in community life.***

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