



# VOICES & VISIONS

A VOICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ❖ A PROMISING VISION FOR TOMORROW

## 2008 Biennial Assessment of Virginia's Disability Services System Now Available!

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On May 6, the Board shared copies of its 2008 *Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia* with the Governor, Secretary of Health & Human Resources, members of the General Assembly, and other senior officials. Posting to the Board's website and broader distribution to individuals with disabilities, their family members, service providers, policymakers, advocates, the media, and other Board constituents followed.

Like the inaugural 2006 edition, the 2008 *Biennial Assessment* focuses on services funded or operated by the Commonwealth that are available from multiple state and local agencies or private providers. Each chapter addresses a basic type of services that may be needed by individuals with disabilities across their lifespans. Updated and expanded chapters cover early intervention, education, community and institutional supports, healthcare, community housing, transportation, employment, and advocacy & information resources. A new chapter on emergency preparedness responds to growing concerns about government response to natural and other disasters.

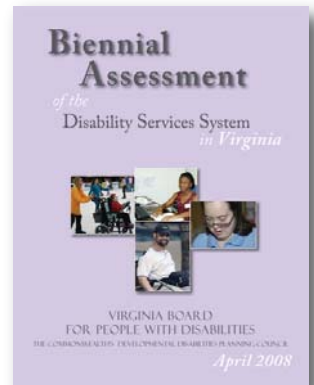
Each chapter describes available services, eligibility criteria, access & delivery, costs & funding, and monitoring & evaluation. Changes and new services implemented since publication of the 2006 edition are highlighted. Whenever possible, analysis of program data from state fiscal years 2005 to 2007, and sometimes longer periods, identifies trends in service needs and

delivery. Chapters conclude with extensive lists of references, and a new listing of agency and program acronyms now accompanies the comprehensive index.

Development of the 2008 *Biennial*

*Assessment* began more than a year before its release with the collection of extensive constituent input through a series of public comment opportunities held across the state. Additional feedback from concerned individuals and organizations was received by mail, fax, e-mail, and telephone.

While staff researched and revised the factual content of each chapter, a special ad hoc committee of Board members used this input, similar public guidance collected by partner agencies and advocacy organizations, and its own experiences to identify more than one hundred areas of concern for Virginia's disability services system. These concerns, plus sixty-seven Board recommendations addressing them, are included in appropriate chapters. An Executive Summary, available as a stand-alone document, provides an overview of systemic changes since the 2006 edition and highlights progress made, remaining challenges, and key Board recommendations.



(continued on page 3)

## Letter from the Director: What's Next?

Heidi Lawyer



In February, I celebrated my fifth anniversary as Director of Virginia's Developmental Disabilities (DD) Planning Council. The time has flown by, and I remain honored to hold this position and challenged to ensure that the Board is a meaningful contributor to positive change in its constituents' lives.

As I write my tenth Director's Message (twice a year), there is another personal milestone that I would like to share. This June, the older of my two sons, who has autism, exited secondary school at age 21, a huge transition for him and me. Like many other parents, I ask myself, "What's next?"

That question was easier to answer for my younger son. He headed off to college and has big plans for his future (including, hopefully, the ability to repay his college debt).

His older brother could have stayed in school another year, but he let us know (through what professionals call "challenging behavior") that he was SO OVER high school. Wouldn't anyone his age be?

On the other hand, he was a model citizen at his internship job site, proud to be going to work, focused, happy, and productive. He is ready for the next phase of his life, but is the rest of the world ready for him? I suspect not, and it makes me ponder where we have been and where we are going as a community and as a Commonwealth. What's next?

Those of us with multiple roles, as individuals with disabilities or their family members as well as disability advocates and professionals, often have to balance personal needs and views with a bigger picture. That is why the Board, with its diverse membership, promotes establishment of a service system that equitably supports persons with all developmental disabilities—intellectual, physical, neurological, sensory, all.

I deeply respect families that say, "This is the time for our disability to get some attention," and I understand how many years of neglect, purposeful or not, can result in competition for scarce resources.

However, when we continue to promote this competition, focus on building and maintaining service system "silos", and provide supports for one type of disability or diagnosis at the expense of another, we lose as a Commonwealth. There will always be

someone with a quieter voice, less organized support, and less political clout who will be left out.

Reviewing the Board's just-released 2008 *Biennial Assessment*, I marvel at the progress made during my son's life in many of our support systems, particularly in early intervention and education. He was not diagnosed with autism until age four and missed an opportunity for early intensive services. Many treatment and educational options available for families today simply did not exist for us. Since then, support services have come a long way due to the hard work of dedicated people with disabilities, families, advocates, providers, educators, researchers, and policymakers, but the changes have not come quickly, they have not been systematic, and there is so much more to be done.

As a Commonwealth, we have too often pursued fragmented and incremental changes influenced by political considerations, economic realities, response to an emergency or tragedy, and by which advocacy voices are the strongest and best organized. Despite good intentions, philosophy, and commitment by a diverse group of citizens, advocates, and policymakers, Virginia lags far behind many other states in providing community supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and in embarking upon the true system reform that other states have long embraced.

The Board has been criticized for being too Utopian, for promoting options for which the state's citizens are not ready, for focusing on what is wrong with the system rather than what is right with it, and for seeking to change what others see as working well enough. We respect and appreciate the work of our colleagues in state and local agencies and those in other advocacy organizations, but as the state's DD Council, we have a responsibility to look beyond the status quo, to ask questions and seek answers. None of us should be afraid to be wrong, to change our minds when evidence points to a better conclusion, to work with those who have disagreed with us in the past, or to engage in fierce and lively debate on issues that affect so many lives.

As I go to bed each night, I am thankful for the supports that my family has received over the years, but I lie awake wondering who and what will be there for both my sons in the future, especially when I am gone. Those are the questions that keep me engaged in the dialogue and for which I do not yet have answers. For them and the Commonwealth, what's next? ♡

## DD Network Update

Colleen Miller, Executive Director, Virginia Office for Protection & Advocacy

Although much of the media attention during the recently completed and busy Virginia General Assembly session focused on mental health issues, the legislature also addressed many other important bills for people with disabilities. Three, in particular, concerned the Virginians with Disabilities Act (VDA).

The VDA was first passed in 1985, many years before the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law. The VDA prohibits discrimination in many areas of community life, including housing, voting, employment, governmental operations, education, and public accommodations. The outcomes for all three bills reinforce the Commonwealth's long-standing commitment to the rights of all people with disabilities.

The first of two changes to the VDA adds public schools to the "public accommodations" section of the Act. Although the VDA already prohibits discrimination in education, there was some controversy about whether school activities that take place outside the classroom, such as athletic events or school plays, were included. The new law makes it clear that all

aspects of public schools must fully welcome people with disabilities.

Another significant change to the VDA expands the kinds of disabilities covered by its service animal provisions. Previously, state law protected only the use of service animals by individuals who are blind, hearing impaired, or mobility impaired. The law now says "or otherwise disabled." This seemingly simple change will have positive implications for people who use service animals to assist with less obvious disabilities, such as epilepsy or mental illness.

Most remarkably, the new law also specifically includes people who train service animals. The VDA now defines a "three unit service animal team" composed of the service animal, the person with the disability, and an adult trained to handle the animal. This provides VDA protection to someone with a disability who is only learning to use a service animal but cannot yet use it without another's assistance. While Virginia's and other states' laws cover service animals in training, the new concept of a three unit service animal team may be unique to the Commonwealth.

In contrast to these favorable changes, the General Assembly also considered a change in the VDA that would have hurt people with disabilities. The proposal would have allowed some state government operations to discriminate against people with disabilities in their contracts with businesses. Under pressure from advocates, that proposal was defeated.

Today, a strengthened Virginians with Disabilities Act remains a strong guardian against discrimination. We must all remain vigilant and fight to keep it that way. ♡♡

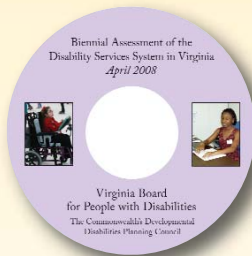


### Biennial Assessment Now Available!

(continued from page 1)

The 2008 *Biennial Assessment* can be accessed, and easily searched for specific content, on-line at [www.vaboard.org/biennial.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/biennial.htm). Print, CD-ROM, and other accessible versions can be obtained by contacting the Board at [info@VBPD.virginia.gov](mailto:info@VBPD.virginia.gov) or 1-800-846-4464.

The Board appreciates the extensive, on-going support it received from the many state agencies and other public and private partners that identified system changes, provided data, and otherwise helped ensure the accuracy and clarity of the 2008 *Biennial Assessment*. The result is a more comprehensive and informative report. The Board welcomes readers' feedback as it begins planning for the next edition. ♡♡



### New Voices & Visions Schedule

To improve the timeliness of our reporting on Board activities, the *Voices & Visions* schedule is changing. Publication is moving from the months before Board meetings to the months after Board meetings. The change is gradual. The previous issue was distributed in March rather than February. Distribution of this issue, in June, is also a month later than in the past. The new schedule will begin in the fall with future issues to be distributed in October, January, April, and July. ♡♡

## Partners in Policymaking: Embarking on a Lifelong Path

Erin Hickey



With their graduation on May 17, twenty-one advocates for the rights of people with disabilities joined a nationwide network of parents and self-advocates working to create systems change.

Completing a series of two-day training sessions that began eight months ago, the 2008 Partners in Policymaking graduates have acquired the information and skills needed to become knowledgeable and effective advocates in their communities.



*Thomas Leach provides technical assistance to Nicole Cossou*

At the General Assembly Building in April, class members honed their advocacy skills delivering testimony in a mock committee hearing chaired by Delegate Joe Morrissey. Other volunteer panelists were Delegate Jimmie Massie, Richmond School Board member Carol Wolf, Senator Creigh Deeds' legislative aide David Walsh, Jack Brandt and Clyde Mathews from VOPA, and Board staff. Partners and panelists exchanged valuable feedback on a range of topics including transition from

school to community, transportation challenges for wheelchair users, and parental consent for termination of special education services.

Fellow advocates and prominent leaders in the field joined the Partners at a celebratory banquet the evening before their graduation. At graduation, class member Janelle Short succinctly reviewed the high points of their training and sparked laughter with her "Top Ten Ways to Recognize a Partner in Policymaking".



*Linda Kugelman introduces classmate Jim Bauman*

At their final session, the Partners also presented on projects, developed during their training, that utilize their newfound skills and represent the first steps on a lifelong path. While it is not uncommon for Partners to enter the program with the sole intent of improving their own lives, they leave realizing that they have the power to improve the lives of all Virginians.

For information on how to become a Partner and better find your way as an advocate, visit [www.vaboard.org/policymaking.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/policymaking.htm). ♡

## YLF Update

Kara White



### Youth Leadership Forum Surges Ahead

Demonstrating their leadership skills, 2007 YLF alumni co-led self-determination discussions and shared their transition experiences with students, parents, educators, and other participants at the March 2008 Virginia Transition Forum in Roanoke. Among the topics covered, 2007 Delegates described the active role they now take in their IEP and 504 meetings as a result of their YLF experiences. Youth attendees were encouraged to apply for the 2008 YLF, and educators, guidance counselors, and parents were strongly encouraged to share application information with all eligible students.

This July's YLF agenda is set, with a fantastic lineup of speakers and activities sure to be the best to date. Highly regarded disability rights advocate and first-time YLF presenter Richard Pimentel will provide the keynote address for the Networking and

Mentorship Luncheon. Mr. Pimentel, whose life was portrayed in the 2007 motion picture "Music Within", is a passionate spokesperson on employment of people with disabilities and an acknowledged authority on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). He is distinguished by his ability to predict industry trends and employers' needs and has designed and implemented return-to-work systems for private and governmental employers throughout the country.

2007 Delegates Julia Blitz, Elizabeth Pappas, Steve Phillips, Macy Rucker, Matthew Shapiro, Alexander Snyder, and Charlotte Woodward will return as staff for this summer's program. These alumni have shown great leadership since their YLF graduation and kept the staff well informed of their accomplishments. Congratulations to all! ♡

## 2007-2008 Policy Fellowship: Mutually Rewarding Scholarship

Linda Redmond

At its June quarterly meeting, the Board's 2007-2008 Disability Policy Fellow Elliot Duncan presented a summary of his work in support of the Board's policy and program efforts. Over the past year, Elliot participated in committee meetings and liaison activities, monitored legislative hearings, and completed two research projects.



In his first research project, Elliot reviewed literature on the Customized Employment model. His analysis looked at the application, evolution, and effectiveness of this innovative approach to assisting persons with disabilities in obtaining gainful employment. He

learned that states adopting this model report success for persons with disabilities in securing jobs with substantial salaries, some even becoming profitable entrepreneurs with their own companies. His findings, presented to the Employment Committee earlier in the year, will prove useful in guiding the Board's future advocacy and funding in that area.

Elliot's principal research project compared housing priorities set for persons with disabilities under Consolidated Plans for eight jurisdictions in two very different regions, substantially urban Northern Virginia and the mostly rural Shenandoah Valley. He found that the plans' priorities focused primarily on

income eligibility factors and sub-populations specifically targeted by federal housing guidelines.

A graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University, Elliot will receive his Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling in December 2008. After graduation, he plans to obtain employment in mental health services. His long-term goals include obtaining a doctorate in health policy and opening an educational and residential academy for inner city males with and without disabilities.

Asked what he found most meaningful from his Fellowship, Elliot responded: "Issues of advocacy. I developed a new appreciation for the significance of advocacy, self-advocacy to be more specific. Watching the perseverance of persons with disabilities reminds me why I decided to make a career change from industrial psychology into the human services field. Although my work in industrial psychology was important, I find assisting persons in making changes for themselves and their local communities to be more rewarding." Elliot's time with the Board has been mutually rewarding, and it wishes him success in his plans. ♡♡

### 2008-2009 Policy Fellow Welcomed

This month, the Board also congratulates its competitively selected 2008-2009 Policy Fellow, Hsing-Jung Chen, a current Ph.D. candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Social Work. Recipient of a Master's Degree from Fu-Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, Ms. Chen has most recently worked as a data analyst with the Partnership for People with Disabilities and a graduate research assistant at the School of Social Work.

Ms. Chen received academic awards for excellence at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In 2004, a case study written by her was published in the professional journal *Counseling and Guidance*, and a second article is currently under review for publication. Several years ago, after over four years as a hospital psychiatric social worker in Taiwan, Ms. Chen immigrated to this country where she is now a permanent resident. The Board looks forward to working with her over the next year. ♡♡

### Stakeholder Feedback Opportunities

The Board would like to thank The Arc of Virginia for the opportunity to participate in its first Annual Convention in Waynesboro on April 10-12, 2008, and for the opportunity to hold an informal **Stakeholder Feedback Forum** with its attendees. The discussion was lively and informative, and the Board looks forward to future opportunities to hear from The Arc's members and to work together on shared goals.

Other support, advocacy, and professional organizations interested in hosting similar feedback forums are encouraged to contact Tom Driscoll, the Board's Strategic Planning Manager, at [thomas.driscoll@vbpd.virginia.gov](mailto:thomas.driscoll@vbpd.virginia.gov) or 804-786-9380.

The Board also encourages all *Voices & Visions* readers to participate in its annual on-line **Consumer Satisfaction and Stakeholders Feedback Survey** in August and September.

Watch for more information later this summer on the Board's web site at [www.vaboard.org](http://www.vaboard.org) or in its periodic NEWS@VBPD e-mail messages. If you are not already a subscriber to NEWS@VBPD, you can sign up by sending an e-mail to [INFO@VBPD.virginia.gov](mailto:INFO@VBPD.virginia.gov) with "Subscribe to NEWS@VBPD" in the subject line. ♡♡





# Meetings & Events of Interest

## Board for the Blind & Visually Impaired Qrtly Board Meeting

July 7, 2008 1:00pm  
Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired  
397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227  
Contact Eva.Ampey@DBVI.virginia.gov or (804) 371-3110

## Board Meeting - Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology

July 10, 2008 9:30am  
Department of Health Professions, Perimeter Center, 9960 Mayland Drive, 2nd Floor, Suite 200, Conference Room 1, Richmond, VA  
Contact lisa.hahn@dhp.virginia.gov or (804) 367-4424

## Strong Roots for a Healthy Future

July 12, 2008 7:30am  
Medical Home Plus  
Contact 877-264-8366 or www.medhomeplus.org,  
Marriott at City Center, Newport News, VA

## Board Meeting - Board for Hearing Aid Specialists

July 16, 2008 9:00am  
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation  
9960 Mayland Drive, Suite 200, Richmond, VA 23230  
Contact hearingaidspec@dpor.virginia.gov or (804) 367-8590

## Statewide Independent Living Council Committee Meeting

July 16 - 17, 2008  
Department of Rehabilitative Services  
Contact: richard.kriner@drs.virginia.gov or (800) 464-9950

## Governing Board Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy

July 22, 2008 9:00am  
VOPA Office, 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, VA 23230  
Contact lisa.shehi@vopa.virginia.gov or (800) 552-3962

## Virginia Brain Injury Council Quarterly Meeting

July 25, 2008 1:00pm  
Department of Rehabilitative Services, 8004 Franklin Farms Drive, Richmond, VA 23229, Conference Rooms 103-105  
Contact kristie.chamberlain@drs.virginia.gov or (804) 662-7154

## State Rehabilitation Council

August 11, 2008 10:30am  
Department of Rehabilitative Services, DRS Headquarters, 8004 Franklin Farms Drive, Richmond, VA 23229  
Contact barbara.tyson@drs.virginia.gov or (804) 662-7010

## Governing Board Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy

September 23, 2008 9:00am  
VOPA Office, 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, VA 23230  
Contact lisa.shehi@vopa.virginia.gov or (800) 552-3962

**Next Board Meeting**  
**September 10, 2008**  
**Wyndham Richmond Airport Hotel**  
**4700 S. Laburnum Ave., Richmond, VA**

*For more Meetings & Events of Interest, visit our website at [www.vaboard.org/meetings.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/meetings.htm)*

### Staff

#### Executive Director - Heidi Lawyer

Teri Barker-Morgan, Tom Driscoll, Elliot Duncan, Erin Hickey, Katherine Lawson, Karen Lindley,  
Nan Pemberton, Linda Redmond, Sandra Smalls, Henry Street, Lynne Talley, Kara White

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