

A Disability Resource Group Publication

Highlights in this Issue:

- *Dialog in the Dark—a Review*
- *Assistive Technology at your fingertips*
- *Meet Danielle, one of our Athens participatory researchers*



Working to bring about full inclusion of all Georgians with disabilities, in all aspects of the community.

FROM THE DIRECTOR: “WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE BLIND?”



For most of my adult life, people have asked me this complicated question. Now, everyone can get a little taste of blindness at the new Dialog in the Dark exhibit in midtown Atlanta. For one hour, small groups of visitors explore five rooms in the total dark. Guides who are visually impaired lead the tours, assisting and encouraging the partici-

pants to search for interesting items. The purpose is not so much to experience blindness, but to have fun using one’s other senses.

A city park, a grocery store, a boat house and boat, a city street and a little café are all simulated on this fun tour.

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LEARNING BY DOING: A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH STORY

Imagine that a group of older, white, male professors from a Boston University were the sole researchers for a study of the attitudes of young African-American women in South Georgia. The accuracy of their findings would be dubious at best, since a genuine participation on the part of the young women could be easily questioned. The pushback among both the South Georgia and academic communities would likely be signifi-

cant. Now, think about the fact that, for the entire history of social science, people *with* disabilities have been studied primarily by people *without* disabilities. Would you imagine that the latter scenario would be somehow different?

This spring, the staff of Disability Resource Group (DRG) was asked to participate in a pilot Participatory Action

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EXCHANGE

LEARNING BY DOING

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Research Project, working with researchers at the Burton Blatt institute at Syracuse University. Nancy Duncan, Executive Director of DRG (who is herself completely blind) was asked to be team-leader for a project examining access for person's with disabilities to civic facilities and programs in two Georgia cities. Two teams conducted the research, each consisting of two researchers without disabilities and three researchers with disabilities - blindness, mobility impairment and hearing loss. The hope was that the leadership and participation of persons with disabilities would provide a more accurate assessment of the quality of accessibility in these com-

"We realized that what is accessible on paper is NOT accessible in reality"

munities.

Each participant used objective standards to rate accessibility for people with his or her disability at six sites in each city: the civic center, library, city hall, one park, the public transit system and the



Pam Wilkerson was on our Athens research team. She has a hearing impairment.

police department. Each team member visited each site in person, checked the respective websites, called for particular information about accessible services and e-mailed for answers to specific disability related issues. Team members with a disability had unlimited access to personal assistance and both initial and ongoing training and support during the research work. The academic researchers and the team leader compiled the research questions and sorted



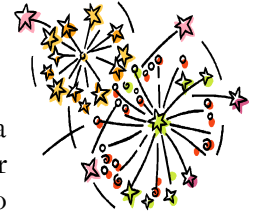
Nancy, Amanda, Katie & Bob, members of our Savannah Research team, gather for lunch.

them for appropriateness for the communities and the participants conducting the research. The findings are being coded now and they will be compiled into documents that can be used to empirically document lingering barriers to community participation for people with disabilities. The carefully collected data may also serve as a basis for justification for grants for service providers and requests for funding from local governments to improve public access.

Over the next two years, DRG will be training and supporting other southeastern state affiliates in carrying out similar research in their own communities. Our next newsletter will describe some of the specific findings of this innovative Participatory Action Research.

"One of the best things about this research experience was the camaraderie that arose instantly among the 5 researchers. One person with a visual impairment, one with a hearing impairment, one person with a mobility impairment and 2 non-disabled people."

CELEBRATION STORIES



DRG received a call from an older woman with mobility impairment who lives at a Continual Care Retirement Center. “Grace” wanted to know if the retirement center was required to provide designated, accessible parking spaces assigned individually to persons with disabilities who live there. We told her that the Fair Housing Amendment of 1988 does indeed require that accessible spaces be designated for residents who qualify for them. We sent her the proper legal information, which she passed on to the center’s management. Nothing happened. She contacted us again and we agreed to call the manager of the facility. We called him daily, leaving pleasant messages describing the reason for our call but not revealing the name of the woman who called us. After one week of calling, we finally reached the manager. We explained the law to him and faxed him the relevant regulations. He agreed to take action immediately. “Grace” has since called us to say that the spaces have now been assigned and made accessible. A few simple actions on our part made life much easier for over twenty people at this center!

§

Sara, one of our immigrant/refugee Outreach Coordinators, recently helped a family from Eritrea, Africa obtain a Medicaid waiver for their fifteen year old son with autism. The family’s minimal knowledge of English, combined with their total inexperience working with service systems, would have made this accomplishment impossible without frequent assistance from this dedicated staff member. Sara helped this family understand the resources available for their son, helped them obtain and file the necessary forms, assisted them in following up on the progress of the application and interpreted for them at each step along the way. They are now working on selecting the best option for their son’s future.

§

“Mary” told one of our Komen Education Coordinators that she couldn’t get a mammogram because at any given time she was too tired from her disabling conditions, too busy going to doctors for her MS or had too little money. However, she did agree to get a clinical exam and with the coordinator’s help found a nearby hospital that gives free mammograms to women without any insurance. The same hospital also has an accessible mammogram machine. Because this coordinator had already taken the time to speak with a nurse at the hospital breast screening center, “Mary” was warmly welcomed and made to feel at ease.

§

This year five thousand women in Georgia will be diagnosed with breast cancer. One thousand will die because their cancer will not have been discovered soon enough. During the last six months, DRG staff provided educational seminars/parties for over 271 women with disabilities and assisted 13 women in getting potentially life-saving mammograms. This project is particularly poignant as October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. As you “think pink” remember that women with disabilities need breast screening, too!



FROM THE DIRECTOR: “WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE BLIND?”

Continued from page 1

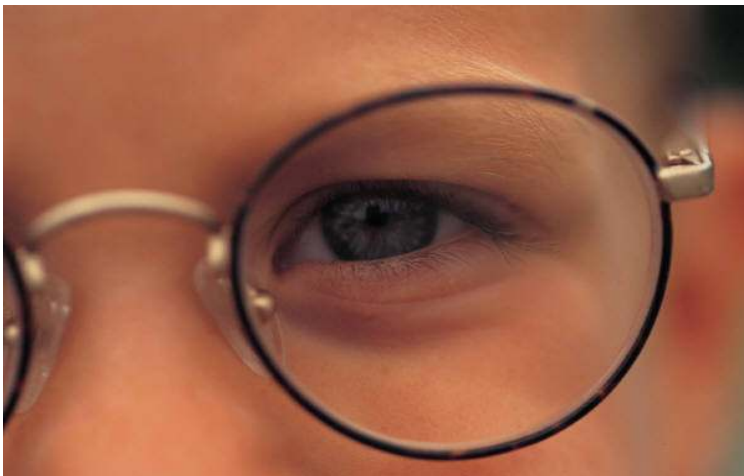
This innovative exhibit has been very successful across Europe and in Israel, Mexico, and Japan. It playfully moves everyone outside his or her normal comfort level, but without any real danger.

“Everyone is in the dark so you are all the same with no reason to feel embarrassed about feeling around...everyone is helping each other.”

I have written down a few of my own thoughts on my visit to Dialog. I would love to hear your own experience at the exhibit.

How Dialog is like being blind:

- There were many interesting things to explore with hands and ears. That is really more exciting than just glancing at objects.
- You are very dependent on a guide and you hope



he/she knows what they are doing.

- Since at any time there could be an obstacle or step ahead, you have to be very cautious and always move slowly.
- You use your imagination more, since you can reach out and touch very few things around you.
- People are judged based on how their voices sound, how friendly they act or how their hands or arms feel.

*For more details and ticket information
visit
www.dialog-in-the-dark.com
or call
404-496-4274*

How Dialog is different from being blind:

- Usually I am the only blind person in my group or in my general vicinity, but on the tour, everyone is in the dark so you are all the same- no reason to feel embarrassed about feeling around – no one to be in control - everyone is helping each other.
- There is nothing dangerous in the exhibit since unlike the real world, it is designed for people who cannot see where they are going.
- The experience lasts only one hour.
- Not seeing, when it is a daily experience is not nearly so frightening as suddenly being in the dark with no idea of where to go.

- Nancy Duncan

DRG ON THE WEB Did you know that our website is FULL of valuable, accessible information? Follow the **Newsletter** link on the homepage to view this letter in text-only or PDF form. And remember, you can make **membership payments** and contributions online! disabilityresourcegroup.org

NEWSBRIEFS:

ADA RESTORATION UPDATE

September 25, 2008

President Bush Signs ADA Amendments Act of 2008 Into Law.

S. 3406, the "ADA Amendments Act of 2008" clarifies and broadens the definition of disability and expands the population eligible for protections under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

For nearly two years, disability rights advocates have traveled the nation in a modified

bus educating citizens and policymakers alike of the pressing need to restore vital civil rights protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Since the *ADA Amendments Act* has been signed into law, *ADA Watch* and the *National Coalition for Disability Rights*, the nonprofit organizations behind the *Road To Freedom* bus tour, have praised all of those involved in this successful campaign to advance disability rights.

For more information, visit www.adabill.com or www.aapd.com

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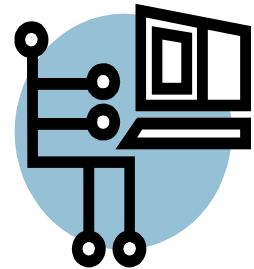
Ever wonder what keeps us busy here at DRG?

In October, we talked with:

- 329 individuals with disabilities
- 77 service providers
- 38 businesses or business groups
- 6 educators

- 5 disability organizations
- 4 employers
- 3 Industry Representatives
- 2 state agency staff
- 2 researchers

Add to that 2 public exhibits and over 1,000 handouts distributed!



DISABILITY HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

New York

[Blind Attorney Proves He's Made of Iron](#)

Washington D.C

[High Court Declines to Review FedEx Disability Discrimination Case](#)

New Jersey

[Jury Awards \\$400,000 to Deaf Patient for Denial of Interpreter Services](#)

Baltimore, MD

[Disability Awareness Day to be Observed Saturday, October 23rd](#)

(Links to full articles on these stories available in the web-based newsletter at www.gaada.info)

EXCHANGE

Feel FREE to Handle the Merchandise!

How stores are getting savvy to consumers with disabilities



All in One access is a store specifically designed for accessible home environments. Recently Nancy and her husband Joe took a trip to their showroom to checkout accessible bathtubs, showers and other home features that more Americans will be taking advantage of as the population ages.

Assistive and accessible devices are no longer for the rich and famous or well-connected, more and more businesses are GETTING IT...and want you to try out their merchandise!

The visABILITY store at the Center for the Visually Impaired is choc-full of assistive technology, toys, and practical home products for people with visual impairments. And, of course, they welcome patrons to test the merchandise as well.

Here are some other sources for assistive technology here in Atlanta:

Touch the Future www.touchthefuture.us

TechAble www.techable.org

Tools for Life www.gatfl.org



NEW @ DRG

STAFF NEWS:

Rick Welch has joined the DRG team as a Resource Specialist. Since our very own **Amanda Neiman** has picked up an internship, Rick is helping with grant-writing, editing, and other needed office functions.

*

Nancy Duncan continues to stay busy with ADA and Disability training throughout the state. This fall she will be working with Intercontinental Hotels Group, the Gap, the Department of Public Health and the Global Universal Design Commission.

*

PROJECTS:

DRG participated in a pilot research project, funded by Syracuse University. (see article on pages 1,2). We are now advising head researchers as they look to spread the project to 3 other states next year. Nancy and the research team will have an important role in this multiplication process.

MOVIE REVIEW: *MUSIC WITHIN*

As I watched *Music Within* I gained a keener understanding for the plight of the many Vietnam Veterans who returned home from the war with disabilities that prevented them from getting jobs and even entering public places. I was struck by the struggles that the movie's main character, Richard Pimentel, and his friends encountered. The film chronicles Richard's journey from hearing-impaired veteran to one of the nation's premier advocates for people with disabilities. Were that I were so bold and driven in the face of struggle and injustice. I think *Music Within* should be required viewing for folks that I know who wonder why I'm doing what I do.

—Katie Weaver

Music Within gave me the same nostalgic feeling as *Forrest Gump*. It is more realistic and the disability piece is head on. The movie powerfully illustrates my core belief that out of terrible events, good things can happen. We would have probably not had an ADA without the War in Vietnam. Without Richard's Pimentel's experience of discrimination, we would not have had such a dynamic leader for change. The movie was good enough to appeal to everyone but sensitive enough to be very meaningful to me as a person with a disability. I highly recommend it to everyone.

—Nancy Duncan

I was impacted by the portrayal of the truth that one cannot build a life of meaning and purpose around oneself. If any of us are going to experience a life worth living, it is going to have to be about something bigger than ourselves, about someone other than ourselves. There is no true fulfillment in seeking personal glory alone. It's just not big enough to sate our longing for meaning. We need something more. In the crucible of his pain, Richard stumbles upon this key to a meaningful life.

—Rick Welch

To read a more thorough review of *Music Within* please visit <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0422783/>

RESEARCHER SPOTLIGHT: DANIELLE NELSON—ATHENS TEAM



Danielle was born in Miami and adopted when she was 3 days old. When their house was destroyed by Hurricane Andrew, her family was forced to move to Georgia where she has lived ever since.

Danielle has her B.S. in Psychology and has always had a keen interest in people with disabilities. Danielle has volunteered with "Best Buddies," a program which paired her with an older gentleman with autism, and most recently, she has worked for Georgia Options, an Independent Living center in Athens. Danielle works with Nancy's son Daniel and they have developed a very special friendship.

Regarding her interest in working with this population, Danielle says:

I've always been interested in people with disabilities. I guess I'm just curious as to how people with various disabilities experience life. I feel that people with physical and mental disabilities are truly amazing and it saddens me that people and places are discriminatory. A child in a wheelchair should be able to enjoy a day at the park as any other child... A person who is visually impaired should be able to walk into a government building and be able to ask questions as a sighted person would.

Danielle experienced the disappointment that many other researchers did during her experience with our team in Athens. She recounts, "I learned that most places are not equipped for people who have disabilities." From cracked, uneven pavement at parks to stairs without handrails in government buildings, Danielle's research experience with Nancy was eye-opening. We are so thankful for her contribution to this project.

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