

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues
Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities
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Paying tribute to African-American Hoosiers with disabilities

Since the 1920s, Black History Month in February has been a celebratory time for remembering the challenges and achievements of African-Americans in their fight for civil rights and recognizing key events and prominent figures that helped them achieve equal treatment. Several Hoosier African-Americans with disabilities have advanced accessibility and opportunities for all people with disabilities, in addition to their quest for civil rights.

One such leader is Donald Tinsley, who is Deaf, and is the program director of Indiana Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS). A 1994 Partners in Policymaking graduate, he founded and served as the first president of the Indianapolis chapter of National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) from 1994 to 1996. He's served as a national board member, the editor-in-chief for the NBDA NETWORK and as chairperson for the 16th National Black Deaf Advocates Conference in Indianapolis.

In 2003, Tinsley became the first black president of the Indiana Association of the Deaf (IAD) and remains on the board. For his efforts, he received the 2006 Robert Greenmun Award from the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the President Award 2007 from IAD. Other roles include volunteering for the Cultural Inclusion Committee of the Governor's Council and chairing the Relay Indiana Consumer Advisory Committee. Tinsley's activism stems from the example set by his mother, Alice Tinsley, the recipient of the Council's 2007 Community Spirit Award and one of Indiana's disability advocacy pioneers.

Betty Williams, a 1992 Partners graduate who has cerebral palsy, is president of Self Advocates of Indiana and also serves on the national board of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered. Thanks to her efforts, Indiana will host the 2008 national conference in Indianapolis in November. Williams was appointed by the Governor as a lay member of the MR/DD Legislative Study Committee, where she works with legislators to consider issues and draft legislation related to people with developmental disabilities. Williams is also employed with The Arc of Indiana as the coordinator of consumer education and training, and serves on the board of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

Another Partners in Policymaking graduate and local leader for both civil rights and rights of those with disabilities is Melody Cooper of Indianapolis. Like Williams, Cooper has cerebral palsy. She serves on the boards of Self Advocates of Indiana and the Indianapolis Resource Center for Independent Living (IRCIL). Cooper works for the Arc Network in Indiana, an Arc of Indiana program operating in each Bureau of Developmental Disabilities Services (BDDS) district to provide information and resources on Medicaid waivers, other home- and community-based services, and to help people with developmental disabilities transition out of institutional living. She is also a past president of the Kiwanis Club.

In addition to Cooper's efforts, her husband, Joe, recently published "Day Dreamer to Dream Catcher," a book about his journey with dyslexia. "We've been happily married for two years, going on three," she said. "Life is good for both of us."

Active in the disability community for more than 30 years, Ron Brown, who is blind, previously worked for IRCIL and has served 14 years on the board of directors. Through his business, "Cane and Able," Brown teaches orientation and mobility with cane travel to people who are blind across the nation. Additionally, he has been president of the National Federation of the Blind of Indiana for 14 years, and advocates for state and federal law and policy changes that benefit people who are blind.

These leaders have created a better life for those who are part of both the African-American community and the disability community.

Resources for African-Americans with disabilities

A variety of resources are available for African-Americans and other minorities with disabilities that provide services and information tailored to their specific needs. The National Minorities with Disabilities Coalition (NMDC) is a membership-based organization that strives to organize various minorities with disabilities around shared issues of concern.

NMDC sponsors a speakers' bureau that features presenters with disabilities of minority descent from organizations such as Purdue University and United Way. Speakers present on topics including competitive employment and inclusive schools. For more information about the coalition, visit www.nmdc.us.

Additionally, local chapters of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the Indianapolis Urban League offer programs and resources that may be useful for African-Americans with disabilities. The Indianapolis Urban League is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Certified Housing Counseling Agency, which provides housing and family services. It also manages funds allocated to Indianapolis from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) for emergency rental and utility assistance.

More information about the Greater Indianapolis NAACP and the Indianapolis Urban League is available at www.indynaacp.org and www.indplsul.org.

Recruitment underway for Partners in Policymaking

One of the Governor's Council's most popular and meaningful programs is the Partners in Policymaking Academy, which is presented every other year. Potential candidates include people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities who want to help build a barrier-free society where everyone is a valued member of their community.

More than 500 Hoosiers have graduated from the leadership training program. Participants learn leadership skills and techniques to develop positive partnerships with elected officials, school personnel and other individuals who make policy decisions about services important to the disability community.

Session topics include historical information; updates on education issues; information about local, state and federal policy and legislation; and the importance of community organizing.

The next Partners in Policymaking Academy in the Indianapolis area runs from October 2008 through May 2009. Each monthly class includes a Friday session (noon until 8:30 p.m.) and

Saturday session (9 a.m. until 4 p.m.). Participants must attend all sessions and complete homework assignments, including a personal community project.

Partners in Policymaking is based on a program developed by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. Partners are widely recognized throughout the United States and overseas. If selected, hotel, travel, child care and other related expenses are covered by the program.

Academy graduates agree that the commitment is well worth the life changes that result from the training program. To better represent some segments of the population, this year the Council is particularly interested in recruiting people of color with disabilities, parents of young children with disabilities and people with disabilities who live in rural parts of the state.

Those interested in making this level of commitment can obtain an application from the Council at (866) 234-1635 (toll free), (317) 232-7771 (voice), or PIP@gpcpd.org (e-mail). The application period ends June 1, 2008. For more information or to download an application, go to www.in.gov/gpcpd and click on Projects. Materials are available in accessible formats on request.

The Council also has program brochures available to anyone who can help publicize the program, as well as a pool of Partner graduates who can speak to interested groups or individuals.

Overcoming double discrimination

With his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, Martin Luther King Jr. captivated the nation and galvanized the Civil Rights movement. His speech inspired people to believe in a future where all people are treated equally. Black History Month is a time to celebrate the contributions of African-Americans to make this world a better place and to reflect on the strides made in the struggle against prejudice and discrimination. It is also a time for those of us in the disability community to consider how African-Americans with disabilities are treated and the potential for double discrimination.

Several laws are in place to assure African-Americans and all individuals receive equal treatment in the United States. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects citizens from discrimination in public accommodations and employment, among others, based on characteristics such as race and religion. Likewise, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 to ensure people with disabilities are afforded the same treatment and opportunities as all members of society.

Although such laws exist, all of us are responsible for making sure they are enforced. Members of the disability community should take a look at the groups and organizations they are involved in to make sure that African-Americans with disabilities and their families are also active participants. If they aren't, organization members should take action to ensure they are welcomed and their perspectives are respected. Similarly, African-Americans should ensure that people with disabilities and their families are part of their organizations and groups, and that their concerns are addressed.

This month, we not only need to celebrate the progress we have made on civil rights issues, but also continue to work together until we realize the fundamental American principle of equal treatment and access for all.

If you feel you have been discriminated against due to your race, disability or both, contact the Indiana Civil Rights Commission at (800) 628-2909 (toll free) to file a complaint or find other options for addressing the problem. The Civil Rights Commission considers discrimination in the areas of housing, real estate, employment, public accommodations and credit.

New arts Web site for people with disabilities

A new Web site from ArtsWORK Indiana provides the resources and information people with disabilities need to build and grow a career in the arts. At ArtsWORKIndiana.org, people with disabilities can pursue their arts desires, finding information about current opportunities and Indiana's arts movement. ArtsWORK launched the new site to advance its mission to help people with disabilities begin or excel in arts-related professions.

Aspiring artists can connect with other artists in various fields via the Web site, browse arts-related events and activities in the community, and can sign up for a free e-newsletter with features about Hoosier artists with disabilities.

Through ArtsWORK Connection, browsers may register for additional resources and information, including arts-related forums. With this feature, registrants can also add their own events and listings, as well as join the directory of artists.

Following a statewide forum in 2004 that assessed accessibility and opportunity in the arts for people with disabilities, ArtsWORK developed as a collaboration of VSA Arts of Indiana, the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and the Indiana Arts Commission. The forum was sponsored by the Governor's Council and several other organizations. Volunteers across the state have given their time and efforts to help the organization advance its mission, including artists, rehabilitation professionals, college counselors and arts administrators.

To get involved with the organization, look for information about the next meeting on the new Web site. Artists of all types, including writers and performing artists, are encouraged to participate and list themselves on the Web site's directory.

African-American celebrities with disabilities

Many famous U.S. citizens are members of both the African-American community and the disability community. These well-known figures are recognized for their outstanding work — not for their disabilities.

Legendary musician Ray Charles engaged audiences with his unmatched vocal and piano talents while creating a unique R&B sound. After becoming blind in his adolescence, Charles was not deterred from pursuing his dream of music. Stevie Wonder, also a blind singer-songwriter and pianist, is a 25-time Grammy Award winner. In addition, Wonder is proficient on many other instruments, including the harmonica and bass guitar.

Retired basketball superstar for the NBA, Magic Johnson, has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and also announced in 1991 that he tested positive for HIV. The retired Los Angeles Lakers' point guard was elected the NBA's Most Valuable Player three times during his career. Also, long-time talk show host Montel Williams lives with multiple sclerosis. And Whoopi Goldberg, famous actress and comedian, has a learning disability.

Looking further back in history, Harriett Tubman was a well-known civil rights activist who escaped from slavery in the mid 1800s and dedicated her life to rescuing others. At the age of 13, she was struck on the head by her plantation overseer and from then on lived with a form of epilepsy.

Individuals such as these are great examples of how African-Americans and all people with disabilities can pursue opportunities and achieve their aspirations.

Of Note

Order Disability Awareness Month materials

The deadline to order March Disability Awareness Month materials is March 7. Activity packets are now available on one comprehensive CD that ships with each order, and on the Council's Web site, www.in.gov/gpcpd. Along with the CD, each order includes a supply of collateral materials featuring this year's theme, "Attitude is Everything." Additional materials are available upon request as long as supplies last. To order, contact Kim Dennison at (317) 631-6400 (voice) or kim.dennison@borshoff.biz (e-mail).

Conference attendee receives grand prize

Donna Wright from Tipton was the grand prize winner of the drawing that took place at the 2007 Conference for People with Disabilities in Indianapolis. The prize includes a bed-and-breakfast package with an overnight stay for two guests at the Hilton hotel.

Disability Poll open

Input is needed for the 2008 "Indiana Disability Poll: Focus on Voting and Civic Engagement." People with disabilities are invited to share their experiences and ideas about voting and participating in public policy and other political activities. The survey only takes about 15 minutes to complete, and the results will help improve voting and civic engagement for Hoosiers with disabilities. To participate in the survey, visit www.thepollingplace.org.

National public policy seminar March 2–4

Disability Policy Collaboration, a partnership between The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy, is hosting a disability public policy seminar March 2–4 on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., at the Hyatt Regency Washington. The seminar will focus on "Advancing Disability Policy in an Election Year." For more information, visit www.thearc.org or call the Disability Policy Collaboration at (202) 783-2229.

Super Bowl ad

PepsiCo ran a Super Bowl ad featuring a joke that originated from the deaf community. The ad features two actors, both of whom are PepsiCo employees who are deaf. View the ad at www.youtube.com.

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.