

SILC & GILN's

INDEPENDENT LIVING IN GEORGIA

FINDING
EMPLOYMENT
FOR ***PEOPLE***
WITH **DISABILITIES**

PLUS

SILCGA RELEASES
NEW
DOCUMENTARY
ABOUT THE ADA

ADVOCATING
AGAINST
ABLEISM



Inclusion

THE STORY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

ANNUAL REPORT
2022-2023

Letter From the Director

Hello Friends,

At the Statewide Independent Living Council, GA (SILCGA) our mission is, equal participation of people with disabilities within their communities. We accomplish this through education, activism, and partnerships.

This past year we went back to basics. We wanted to establish and re-establish partnerships in order to grow & strengthen our impact around the state. In doing so, we received knowledge on new, exciting programs and existing barriers that required our attention. Each day we committed to improvement and intentional evolution as individuals and as an organization.



For these reasons, I want to dedicate this letter and report to Asia LaShell Cousins. Not having many visitors in our office, this incredible girl would occasionally stop by

to say “hi” and share her infectious smile! At times, our work can become tedious, but Asia’s welcomed and pleasant distraction gave the office the fuel to end the day on a strong note and sharpen our focus on what is continuously needed. Asia is why we advocate; Asia is why we educate. Asia is why we find ways to support. Asia is why I do what I do. This beautiful soul left us far too soon, but Asia’s light will forever shine in my heart!

In this report, you will read how partnerships with the Centers for Independent Living and other entities have been essential in the yearly accomplishment of SILCGA and Georgia Independent Living Network.

Thank you for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "S. Simmons".

Shelly Simmons, Executive Director



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CIL CORE SERVICES



INFORMATION & REFERRAL

We provide information on any subject related to living independently with all disabilities. We also refer individuals to other agencies in our network to assist in gaining independence.



PEER MENTORSHIP

We facilitate partnerships with Peer Mentors. Peer Mentors with disabilities serve as role models and provide moral support and creative solutions for life issues.



IL SKILLS BUILDING

We provide access to trained staff who help consumers build necessary skills that facilitate greater autonomy, empowerment, and independence. These skills include budgeting, resume writing, application assistance, and employment readiness.



ADVOCACY

We work with individuals on self-advocacy and assertiveness to promote personal empowerment. We also provide advocacy activities in partnership with individuals and community members to affect attitudinal and environmental change. Regional consultants are available for all titles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



TRANSITION

We help those with significant disabilities who are at risk of institutionalization or need assistance transitioning from nursing homes and other institutions. Our goal is to help people live and remain at home or in community-based residences with the requisite supports and services whenever possible.



ADDITIONAL SERVICES

We provide a variety of other services and forms of support for consumers, including communication services, assistive technology, and help with any other unique needs a person with a disability encounters.

What Is Independent Living?

Independent Living is about changing policies and practices that underestimate, segregate, or oppress people with disabilities.

Independent Living promotes the idea that people with disabilities have the same rights

and responsibilities and the same control over life choices as those without disabilities.

We, therefore, work to change societal attitudes by moving away from segregation, paternalism, and pity, opting instead for empowerment and independence. «

WHAT WE DO

Our Mission Statement

All of us in the State of Georgia want to contribute to our communities. We all want to go to work, provide for our families, contribute to society, and pay into the system.

However, sometimes our public buildings, living spaces, workplaces, policies and societal attitudes contain barriers preventing some from fully participating and contributing in a meaningful way. These obstacles to participation can frequently be addressed and removed.

The mission of SILCGA is to facilitate equal participation of people with disabilities within their communities.

Here's What's New at SILCGA



Delegations of Advocates from India and Poland Visit SILCGA

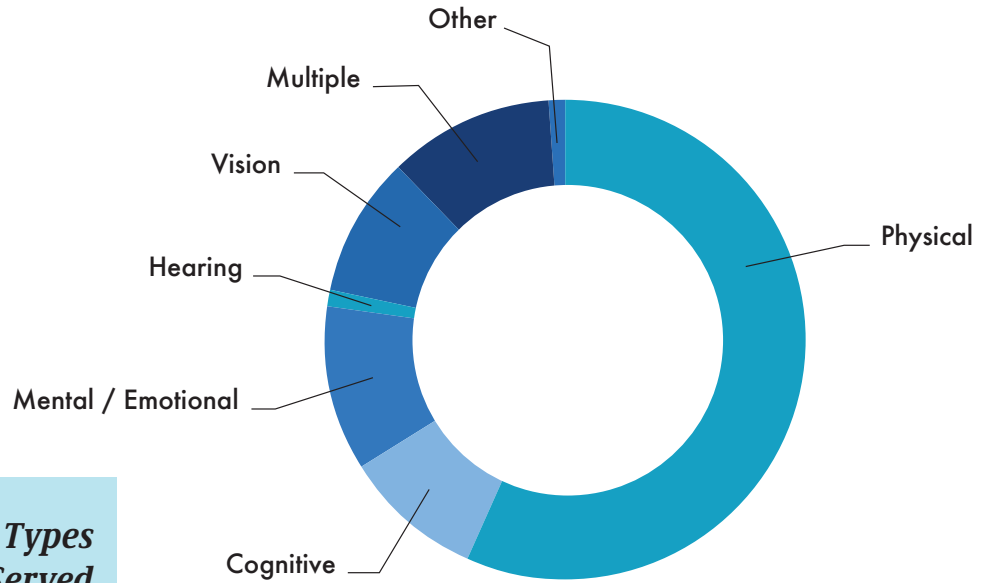
We were grateful to be contacted by the Georgia Council for International Visitors to host visiting disability advocates from India and Poland.

We had productive and exciting conversations about the victories and challenges they face in their respective countries and how we can support each other in the future.

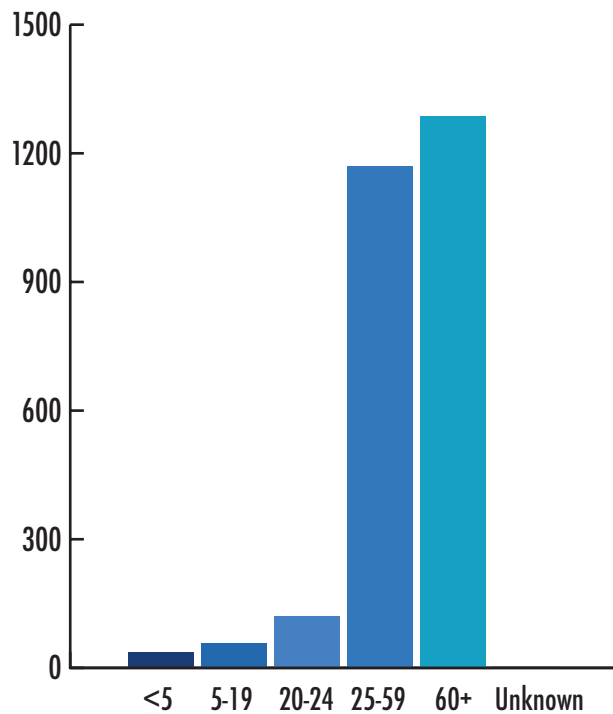


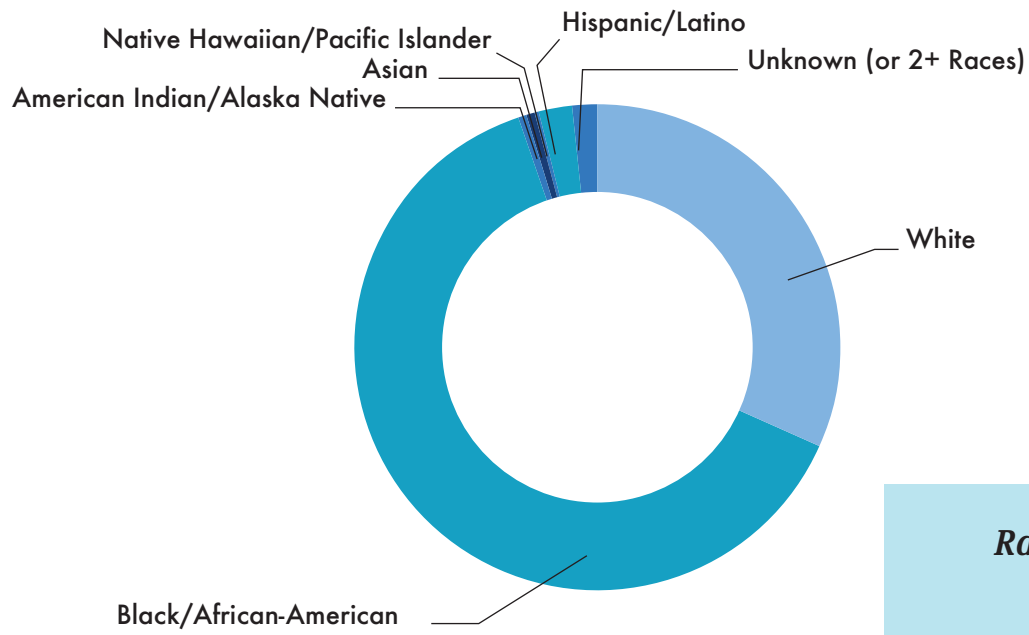
Who the CILs Serve

Disability Types Served

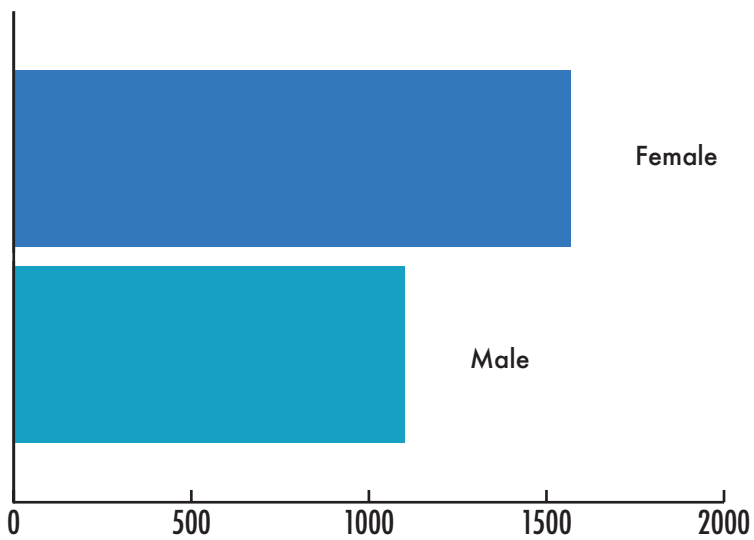


Ages of Citizens Served





Race/Ethnicities Served



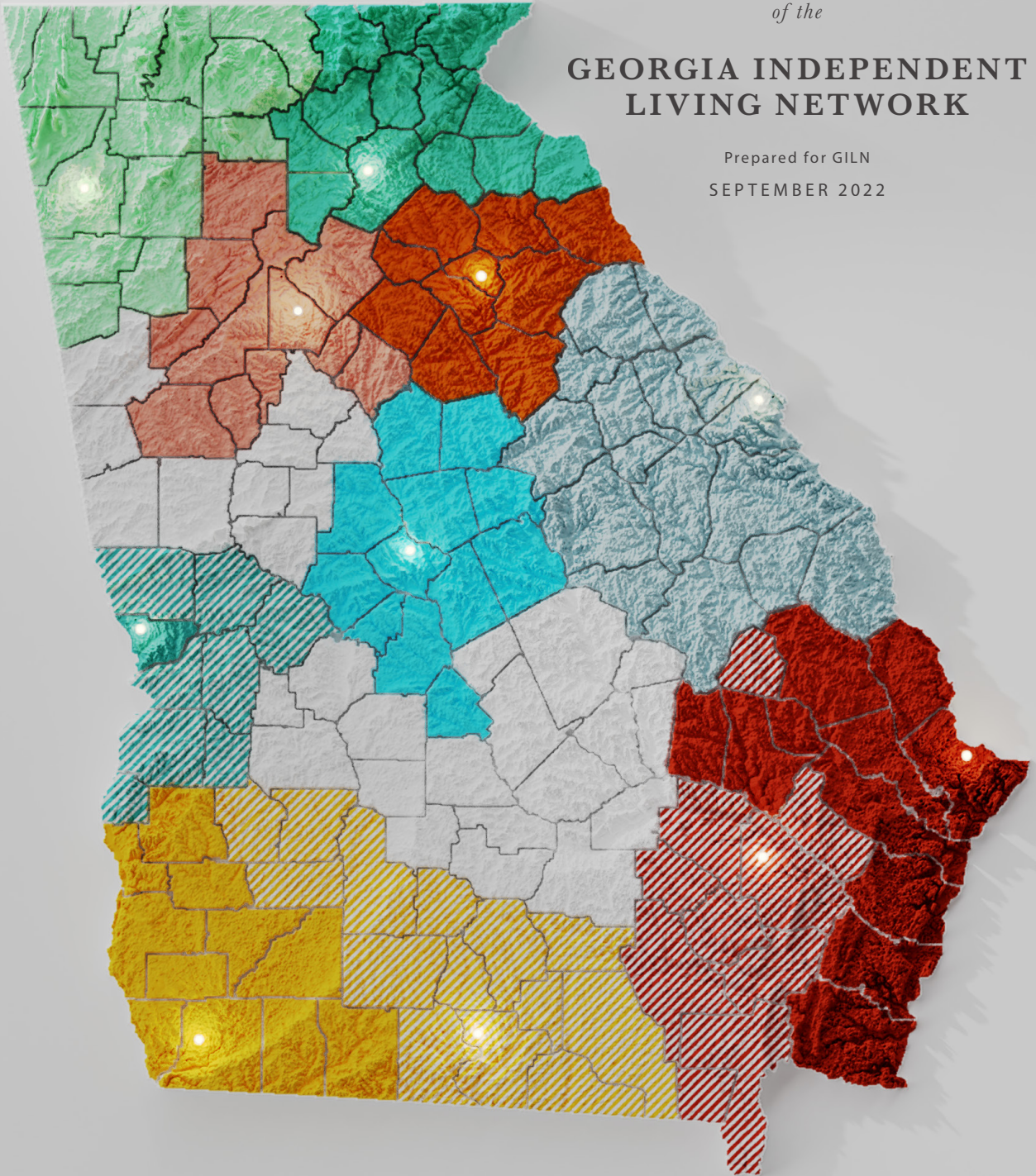
Genders Served

COVERAGE MAP

of the

**GEORGIA INDEPENDENT
LIVING NETWORK**

Prepared for GILN
SEPTEMBER 2022



Northwest Georgia

NWGA CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
ROME, GA

DIRECTOR: CHRISTINA HOLTZCLAW

COUNTIES: BARTOW, CATOOSA, CHATTOOGA, DADE, FANNIN, FLOYD, GILMER, GORDON, HARALSON, MURRAY, PAULDING, PICKENS, POLK, WALKER, WHITFIELD



Metro Atlanta Area

DISABILITY LINK
TUCKER, GA

DIRECTOR: KIM GIBSON

COUNTIES: CHEROKEE, CLAYTON, COBB, COWETA, DEKALB, DOUGLAS, FAYETTE, FULTON, GWINNETT, HENRY, NEWTON, ROCKDALE



West Central Georgia

A2I: ACCESS 2 INDEPENDENCE
COLUMBUS, GA

DIRECTOR: KIRK HOLCOMBE

COUNTIES: CHATTAHOOCHEE, HARRIS, MARION, MUSKOGEE, QUITMAN, STEWART, TALBOT, TAYLOR, WEBSTER



STATE FUNDED ONLY

Southwest Georgia

BAINBRIDGE ADVOCACY INDIVIDUAL NETWORK
BAINBRIDGE, GA

DIRECTOR: MALISSA THOMPSON

COUNTIES: ATKINSON, BAKER, BERRIEN, BROOKS, CALHOUN, CLAY, CLINCH, COLQUITT, COOK, DECATUR, DOUGHERTY, EARLY, ECHOLS, GRADY, LANIER, LEE, LOWNDES, MILLER, MITCHELL, RANDOLPH, SEMINOLE, TERRELL, TIFT, THOMAS, WORTH



STATE FUNDED ONLY

UNSERVED COUNTIES

COUNTIES: BEN HILL, BLECKLEY, BUTTS, CARROLL, COFFEE, CRISP, DODGE, DOOLY, HEARD, IRWIN, JEFF DAVIS, LAMAR, LAURENS, MACON, MERIWETHER, MONTGOMERY, PIKE, SCHLEY, SPALDING, SUMTER, TELFAIR, TREUTLEN, TROUP, TURNER, UPSON, WHEELER, WILCOX



North Georgia

DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER
DEMOREST, GA

DIRECTOR: NANCY PEEPLES

COUNTIES: BANKS, DAWSON, FORSYTH, FRANKLIN, HABERSHAM, HALL, HART, LUMPKIN, RABUN, STEPHENS, TOCCOA, TOWNS, UNION, WHITE



Northeast Georgia

MULTIPLE CHOICES
ATHENS, GA

DIRECTOR: GARRICK SCOTT

COUNTIES: BARROW, CLARKE, ELBERT, GREENE, JACKSON, MADISON, MORGAN, OCONEE, OGLETHORPE, WALTON



Central Georgia

DISABILITY CONNECTIONS
MACON, GA

DIRECTOR: MICHAEL LEVERETT

COUNTIES: BALDWIN, BIBB, CRAWFORD, HOUSTON, JASPER, JONES, MONROE, PEACH, PULASKI, PUTNAM, TWIGGS, WILKINSON



Eastern Georgia

WALTON OPTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING
AUGUSTA, GA

DIRECTOR: TIFFANY CLIFFORD

COUNTIES: BURKE, COLUMBIA, EMANUEL, GLASCOCK, HANCOCK, JEFFERSON, JENKINS, JOHNSON, LINCOLN, MCDUFFIE, RICHMOND, SCREVEN, TALLA FERRO, WARREN, WASHINGTON, WILKES



Southeast Georgia

LIFE: LIVING INDEPENDENCE FOR EVERYONE
SAVANNAH, GA

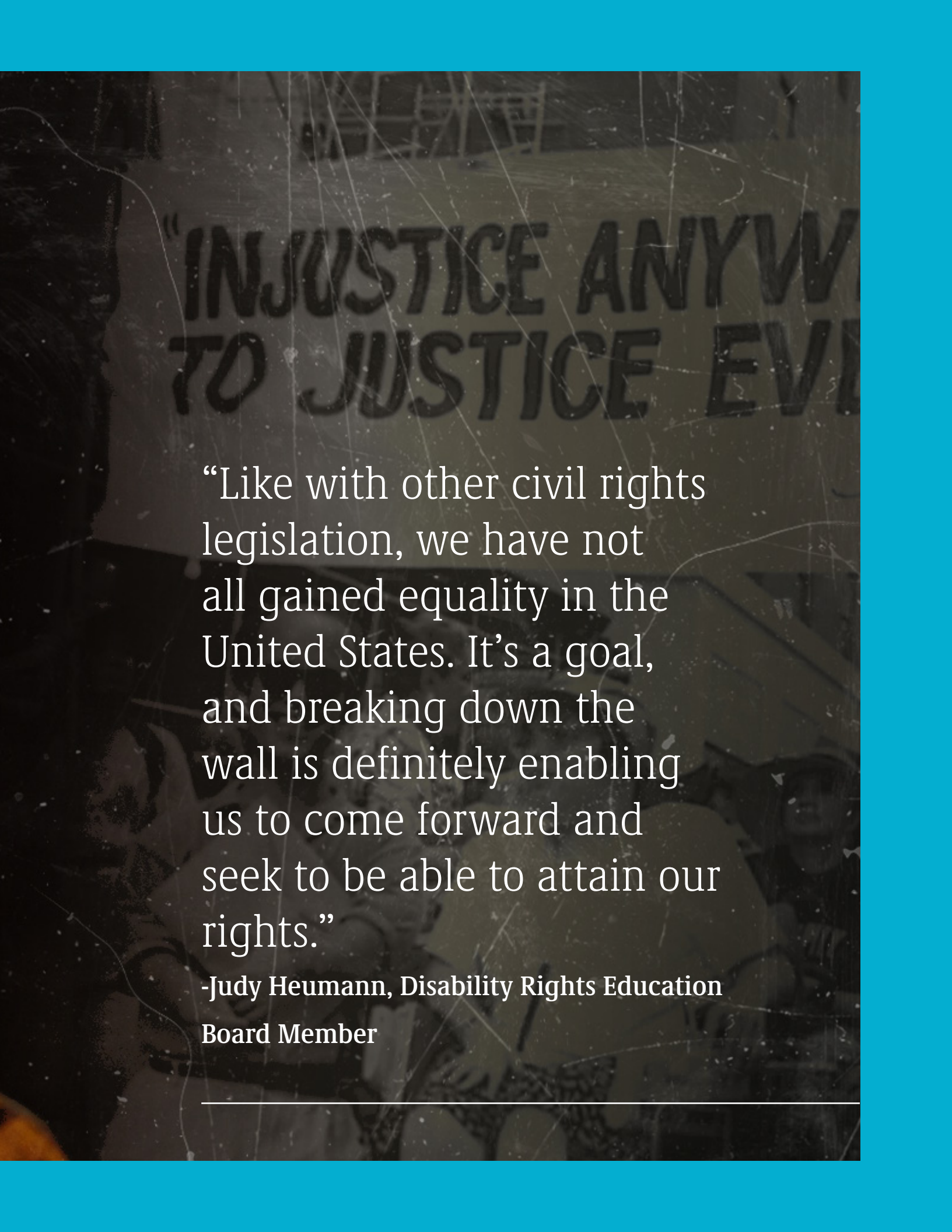
DIRECTOR: NEIL LIGON

COUNTIES: APPLING, BACON, BRANTLEY, BRYAN, BULLOCH, CAMDEN, CANDLER, CHARLTON, CHATHAM, EFFINGHAM, EVANS, GLYNN, LIBERTY, LONG, MCINTOSH, PIERCE, TATTNALL, TOOMBS, WARE, WAYNE



STATE FUNDED ONLY





“INJUSTICE ANYWHERE
TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE”

“Like with other civil rights legislation, we have not all gained equality in the United States. It’s a goal, and breaking down the wall is definitely enabling us to come forward and seek to be able to attain our rights.”

-Judy Heumann, Disability Rights Education
Board Member



Advocating Against Ableism with Dr. Sue ElHessen

“Education and advocacy, I think those are the two main things. Educate yourself about the ADA and how your rights are protected.”

Dr. Sue ElHessen has led a long, successful career in education and disability advocacy. Living in southern California, ElHessen served on Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s Independent Living Council during his tenure. Most recently, she has served more than three years on Governor Gavin Newsom’s Commission on Disability Access.

ElHessen holds a doctorate in human performance improvement from the University of Southern California and a master’s degree in industrial organizational psychology from California State University at Long Beach. In the course of her education career, ElHessen mentored SILCGA’s own executive director, Shelly Simmons.

We spoke with ElHessen about how she continues to work against ableism and what everyone can do to help. (This interview has been edited for concision and clarity.)

Question: What is our current environment like, in terms of the ableism people are facing?

Answer: When we don’t advocate for ourselves or our children who may have disabilities, then we are leaving a huge gap in regard to having an inclusive society as a whole. I think when we start to reevaluate the passing of the ADA in July, 1990, to today, in 2023, we’ve made little progress.

Today, we still have medical facilities not accessible. It just floors me when I go to an office, and there’s not a high-low table to transfer to, or there aren’t restrooms that you can use. So we still have a long way to really having full inclusion under the Americans with Disabilities Act. And if we don’t have young people stepping up to the plate and having their voices expressed, where they are in their generation is different than where I am. And so their needs, their concerns – we have to be able to encourage them to have that voice.


Q: What can people do, both people with disabilities and those without, to help fight against ableism?

A: Education and advocacy, I think those are the two main things. Educate yourself about the ADA and how your rights are protected. Learn about your strengths, not only focusing on what you can’t do, but what you can do, and how you can bring your voice to a situation to not only support you, but then support others like you.

I think when people sense your power, they can’t shut you down. Own your own power, and then be able to share that with others.

SCAN

TO HEAR THE
FULL STORY



Excerpted
from
SILCGA’s
Podcast

Accessibility



NOW!

disABILITY LINK holds a youth internship program every year. This year's Youth Program session began July 10th and went until August 3rd. These sessions are a unique opportunity for Secondary School students between the ages of 14 and 22 to learn about job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, and much more!



A major program at disABILITY LINK is their peer-support class. Here are photos of some of their recent graduates from June 2023.



Finding Employment for People with Disabilities

disABILITY LINK | Metro Atlanta

“It really kind of woke me up. I love disABILITY LINK ... I’ve had success with them – getting out of the house, having a little extra money. I feel good, I really do.”

disABILITY LINK is the Center for Independent Living (CIL) Atlanta, the largest city in Georgia and one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the southeast, facing an array of problems distinct from rural or small-town CILs.

Enabling people with disabilities to live independently in an area with a higher rent and a higher cost of living often means training them to support themselves. Consequently, disABILITY LINK places a significant focus on job training and placement.

“We share experiences, we talk about social skills, building social skills, work etiquette, looking at career paths that you may want to do, what that means as far as budgeting and everything that goes along with adult life, that relies on employment or having an income to be able to support themselves,” Director Kim Gibson said.

Some local employers can be hesitant to hire someone with a disability. But through a partnership and internship program, disABILITY LINK trains both employers and employees in how to have the best relationship possible. Holding a job is just one aspect of living on your own in a big city like Atlanta. The process of becoming independent is a holistic one. Sometimes, consumers have to learn to live with their disabilities or manage mental illness before they can hold a job.

disABILITY LINK can step in then, too,

bringing together various resources to enable truly independent living. disABILITY LINK has relationships with local restaurants, AARP, the CDC and other social services organizations. Whatever a person’s disability or their comfort level, there’s a lot of options to choose from. The goal is to find jobs that people want and that they can feel good about doing.

“We bring in employers to hire people right on the spot,” Gibson said. “We’ve had people from Amazon to Dominos and just a wide variety of different kinds of employers. It’s a wide range, you know, from technical to educational kind of jobs, from line staff to management kind of jobs.”

Consumer Elease Mosely was a volunteer at disABILITY LINK who started participating in some of their job training programs. Now, she earns money as a receptionist while continuing in other kinds of workplace education.


“I’m 61 years old, I was a housewife, I was just in and around the house,” Moseley said.

“It really kind of woke me up. I love disABILITY LINK ... I’ve had success with them – getting out of the house, having a little extra money. I feel good, I really do.”

To learn more about disABILITY LINK and the work they do in their area, visit www.disabilitylink.org.


SCAN

TO HEAR THE FULL STORY



Excerpted
from
SILCGA's
Podcast

Accessibility



NOW!



Behind the Making of SILCGA's Documentary

Inclusion: The Story of the Americans with Disabilities Act

"We want to tell the story about how it started, and why even though this law has been around for 30 years, why it's still not necessarily where we need it to be."

Inclusion is a documentary about the legacy of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 30 years after its adoption. Funded by SILCGA, the film is a clear and compelling look at the continued struggles and victories of people with disabilities. We spoke with director Ty Hunt about the creation of Inclusion and what he learned from the experience. (This interview has been edited for concision and clarity.)

Question: What's your background or education in film? What brought you to where you are now?

Answer: I went to film school after being an actor for a little while. And then my very first job out of school was a Budweiser commercial in Orlando, that's where I was, and that commercial went on to win an Emmy. While I wasn't part of the creative team that actually came up with the idea and all that kind of stuff, I was part of the production team to actually help get it to the finish line. And so it was kind of a, yes, I'm in the right spot kind of moment for me. I started out as a production assistant, worked my way up from a P.A., to second

assistant director, to second unit director on a Disney/Coca-Cola commercial. And it was at that point that I was like, yeah, I can kind of do this on my own.

Q: What was the creative process for Inclusion like? How did the idea form?

A: I met with Shelly Simmons and Kelly Rhyne. They were saying, "Hey, we have the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act being signed into law, and we want to tell the story about how it started, and why even though this law has been around for 30 years, why it's still not necessarily where we need it to be."

And I came into it really not knowing much of anything, because I didn't have any real exposure to anybody with any disabilities. Granted, I have met people with disabilities, but I haven't really connected in that kind of way where I truly understood what the issues were. And so that was kind of the perspective that I took with this, because they're saying that it is not quite where it needs to be. My first question is, why? What's missing? What is it that people just

aren't getting? Those are the questions that I ask.

Q: The documentary has really good captioning throughout, as well as some nonverbal communication. It's very accessible. What went into that?

A: From day one, Shelly said, "We want to make sure that everybody can enjoy this." And so when we had our chats, I was asking her, like, "What are some of the things that I need to do to be able to make this more accessible to people that are either hearing impaired or vision-impaired or something like that?"

It was a different experience for me, just because I had never had to do that before. I never even thought about it. But it actually informed me. It forced me to do things in a different way than I was used to, and even the way that I was taught.

Q: What did you learn from this experience that you expect to take with you into other projects?

A: I literally just finished a film where one of the actors has a cognitive disability. The whole premise of the story is, "What would happen if this child and her mother got pulled over by an officer who didn't understand what was happening with her disability, but the child didn't understand either, and things escalated?"

When I was talking to the producer of that film, we were trying to figure out who we were going to cast for the role of the daughter who has the cognitive disability. From the conversations that I had with Shelly and Kelly Rhyne, they were like, "We want to see more people with disabilities in film, you know, because why not, if they have the ability to do it? Just because they have a disability doesn't mean that they can't play this role, right?" And so that was one of the things that I pitched to this producer.

Q: What was your reaction to hearing about the struggle of people with disabilities toward living independently in their own communities?

A: The idea of it was mind boggling to me, that

people weren't able to live their own lives the way that they wanted to. I think that hearing those stories – especially from people like Kelly Buckland, for example, how he wasn't able to go to the theater because they didn't want him there – hurt my heart because, you know, with

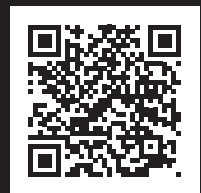


Ty Hunt, director of Inclusion: The Story of the Americans with Disabilities Act

me being a filmmaker, I want you to go see the movie in the theater, right? Simple stuff like that was just disheartening, that people would be so... I guess the word is cruel, to another human being. Just because they have to live their life differently from you doesn't mean that their way of doing it is wrong and that you can't adapt to help them out in some way.

But it was, again, one of those tough conversations, where we won't be able to fix it if we don't know what the problem is. And if we don't have any kind of emotional connection with these stories, then it doesn't matter if we're saying, "We've got to change it." If nobody cares about it, then nobody's going to want to do anything about it.

SCAN
TO BUY THE
DOCUMENTARY



Inclusion

THE STORY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Building Community at Disability Connections

Disability Connections | Macon, GA

“So the barriers are less, but they are certainly still there ... Things are certainly changing, and then we’re trying to change with the times.”

The effects of COVID discouraged all kinds of gatherings across the spectrum of American society. For the disability community, with some members being part of the at-risk population, the pandemic was especially hampering.

Some in-person events are still slow to get back to normal. But at Disability Connections in Macon, they’ve used this time to build a digital presence that stretches beyond their 12-county service area in Middle Georgia.

“We’re working towards more activities and more together, in-person opportunities,” Michael Leverett, executive director of Disability Connections, said. “But one thing that we did during the pandemic is actually try to build our community online space. So we started a community just a year ago. It’s disabilityconnections.tv, and it’s open to anybody, anywhere. We had somebody from New York and other places in the country that have joined it, but we have now over 200 people.”

Disability Connections has become something of a media powerhouse, offering online courses, forums, podcasts and videos for their consumers. Last year, this magazine reported on the completion of a studio, which has been up and running for some time. Their team will soon start producing cooking videos and assistive technology reviews from their accessible demonstration

kitchen.

Alongside their new initiatives, Disability Connections is still doing the bread-and-butter work of any CIL. Nursing home transitions, assistive device training and installation, peer support and advocacy haven’t fallen off during this time.

Kimberly Harrell is a consumer in the Macon area who lives with epilepsy. Her seizures made it difficult to hold a job, which made housing a struggle for her and her two children.

“It is rough to kind of get living off of the small income that I get,” Harrell said. “So Disability Connections helped, it kind of pushed the [Section 8] application on through, and it helped me out a whole bunch.”

After Disability Connections secured housing for Harrell, she was able to devote more time to vocational rehab, completing various certifications and trainings that qualify her for new lines of work. The stability she has now makes her feel empowered, Harrell said.

“I mean, it’s not, as you would say, the glamorous life, but I love it,” Harrell said. “And my kids, they are so happy.”

Debra Davidson is another Disability Connections consumer who lives with knee and lung problems that make getting

around difficult. When people would come to the door of her apartment where she lives independently, it was hard for her to answer it. Davidson sometimes felt unsafe too, having to be up and at the door before she knew who was there.

Edwin McWilliams, a peer supporter at Disability Connections, told Davidson about a Ring lock system that would allow her to control her door from her smartphone. McWilliams installed it for Davidson soon after.

“It’s been a blessing to me, a tremendous blessing,” Davidson said. “I mean, I don’t have to run to the door no more, I can see who’s out there, I can say ‘I’m not letting you in.’ I didn’t have a choice last time, but I have one now. If I don’t want to answer the door, I don’t have to answer the door. So I’m having a pretty good time.”

Beyond this more standard approach to their five core services, Disability Connections has been using their online communities to encourage engagement with young people.

“Finding the young people that are interested in the similar advocacy fight is a little bit more challenging, because they have reached a lot of the success of a more inclusionary school system and community, for that matter,” Leverett said. “So the barriers are less, but they are certainly still there ... Things are certainly changing, and then we’re trying to change with the times.”

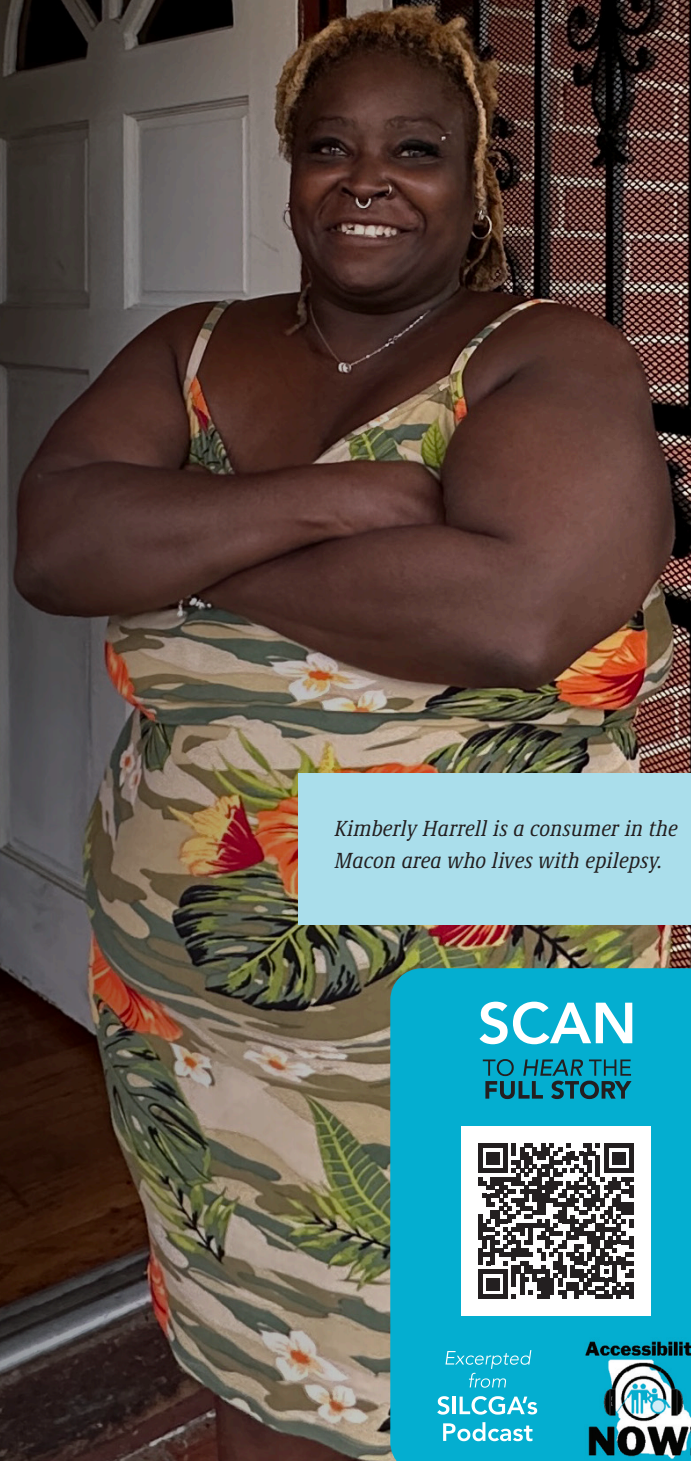
Disability Connections has found some success in covering Houston County high school adaptive sports, using their media capabilities to broadcast various games. One of the CIL’s new hires was a former player for the Houston County Sharks, and the crew who films the games is made up of young volunteers.

Youth involvement is also increasing in other ways. One of the offerings on disabilityconnections.tv is a 2D animation course designed by a self-taught artist, a consumer with autism. Leverett said the consumer has received commendations from the creators of the digital software used in the course.

“We work really, really hard to try to treat

people in a holistic way and make sure that they are connected with every resource that we can think of,” Leverett said. “When you join our community, you have direct access to getting answers pretty quickly.”

You can visit disabilityconnections.com for more information, as well as links to their digital communities and other media projects.



Kimberly Harrell is a consumer in the Macon area who lives with epilepsy.

SCAN
TO HEAR THE
FULL STORY



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Podcast



ITS4US Georgia

Department of Transportation

Safe Trips in a Connected Transportation Network

The ITS4US Deployment Program (<https://its.dot.gov/its4us/>) is a \$40 million multimodal effort, led by the Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Joint Program Office (JPO) and supported by the Office of the Secretary, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration, to identify ways to provide more efficient, affordable, and accessible transportation options for underserved communities that often face greater challenges in accessing essential services.

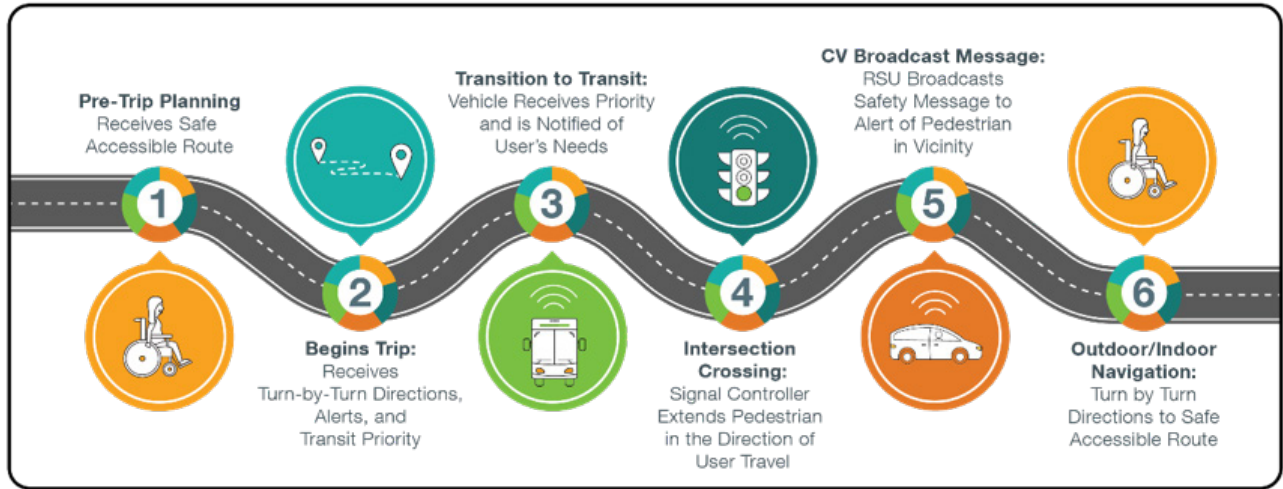
The U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) launched Phase 1 of the program in January 2021 and supported the concept development efforts of select sites, including Gwinnett County's Safe Trips in a Connected Transportation Network (ST-CTN). In June 2022, ST-CTN was one of four sites selected to continue Phases 2 and 3 of the program, which includes the design, testing, operation, and evaluation of the deployment. ITS4US Program sites work together to share information and resources.

ST-CTN seeks to enhance the travel experience for underserved communities, including people with disabilities, older adults, and travelers with limited English proficiency (LEP). It will leverage innovative solutions and existing systems such as connected vehicle (CV) deployments, an advanced trip routing engine, and a regional trip planner – all to be developed within an open-sourced application called the Georgia Mobility and Accessibility Planner (G-MAP). The application will allow travelers to create a personalized trip plan to navigate physical infrastructure, resolve unexpected obstacles,

and ensure visibility, and accessibility throughout their travel. Trips are also able to be shared with appointed individuals if desired. The application will be available via website (georgia-map.com) and a mobile app. The figure below provides an example of a traveler's complete trip experience using G-MAP.

Using the G-MAP application, the traveler's complete trip initiates with the pre-trip planning step which allows the traveler to customize their trip preferences based on their needs and preferences.

In step 2, the traveler begins their trip and receives turn-by-turn directions that meet their defined preferences, provides support services if the traveler needs assistance, and can trigger Transit Signal Priority for buses if the traveler requires accommodation with boarding or alighting a transit vehicle or while waiting for a transit vehicle. Step 3 involves the traveler's transition to transit in which the transit vehicle receives priority and is notified of the traveler's needs. Step 4 allows the traveler to indirectly interact with the signal controller when crossing a signalized intersection if they are unable to press the crosswalk button and provides the traveler with additional time to cross the intersection if needed. Step 5 provides communication to enabled connected vehicles to make them aware of the traveler's presence. Step 6 provides the traveler with hands-free indoor (at select facilities) and outdoor navigation via G-MAP and/or wearables and accessible channels (haptic, voice, text). This includes alerts and dynamic rerouting in response to changes in path conditions and updates on the



operating status of indoor infrastructure such as elevators and escalators.

Development of G-MAP is being led by Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) with support from Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), Gwinnett County, Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia (SILCGA), and consultant partners. The project team is working closely with SILCGA and other representatives of advocacy groups to better understand travelers' needs. G-MAP will be available for use

in Gwinnett County in 2024. The project team will leverage existing travel training programs throughout Gwinnett County to provide G-MAP training and awareness. Upon project completion, the open-source application will be available for other agencies to leverage to fit their specific deployment needs, thus, this work has the potential to improve travel for underserved communities beyond Gwinnett County and Georgia.

Traveler's Complete Trip
(Source: ARC)



U.S. DOT ITS4US Deployment Program Team Photo
(Source: U.S. DOT)



NCIL Conference in Washington D.C. July 24-27, 2023

This year the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) held its annual conference since the pandemic. SCILGA supported a staff and a youth advocate in attending the conference. This is what they experienced.

Natalie DuRante is a 13-year-old 8th grader attending Lindley Middle School, Mableton, GA. Below are some questions she reflected on in relation to the event.

1) What is the ADA?

The ADA is the American Disabilities act.

2) Can you believe that after 33 years people are still marching for this act? If so, why?

Yes, though this act has been signed it still will always take a while

for people to start understanding the problems that people that are discriminated against go through. For things to change, people must understand.

3) What does it mean to be inclusive?

Being inclusive means to not leave out any group that is involved in something.

4) Do you feel if more people in charge of the government were more aware that people would still have to plead for what they need?

No, not being aware of another person's problems can be the very reason another person is being harmed. However, a person can still be aware and selfish.

5) From a young person's perspective could you imagine being born





with a disability, and be told that you have to limit yourself?

No, however I can imagine being told that I have to limit myself for others. But I can't take the limits of others for myself.

6) Did you appreciate the opportunity to go to DC?

Yes. I was able to take good notes on the ableism and racism workshop. I felt like a journalist!

7) How do you feel knowing people that are helping to get policies pushed?

I don't know, it feels normal? It just feels like a normal job to me not that it's not great it just feels like a normal job. I'm taught to always stand up for what is right and for others when I see wrong being done.

8) You visited the African American museum and had to leave. What pushed you to leave and what was that experience like for you?

It was a cool experience. However seeing the lynchings, hearing about the discrimination, and reading what African Americans have been going through on the same day as a march and a tour of the capital was a lot for my brain.

I would like to thank the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia for giving me the opportunity to travel to Washington, DC for the 33rd Anniversary of the ADA. It was an amazing experience. I was able to be a part of the march, walk the floors of our historic nation's Capitol, and took part in several learning workshops. Collectively, these activities opened my eyes to new forms of advocacy.

As the words, "Our Homes Not Nursing Homes" rang through the air, I remembered watching my father taking care of his blind father, his grandmother who was paralyzed from the waist down, and much later his wife's grandmother either in their home or his home. What a privilege it was for me to witness this as a child. I think about my cousin that went into a nursing home at the age of 13 after a traumatic incident and died there earlier this year at the age of 40. I wonder why people with disabilities and their families are still fighting for basic needs after 33 years.

It gives me such pleasure to be a part of an organization that advocates for people with disabilities. Learning and growing as I use my voice for the good of all.

-Ester DuRante

SILCGA Staff Advocate.



Building Independent Living from the Ground Up at Phoenix Station

Finding accessible housing for their consumers is a big part of the fight that CILs face every day. People living with disabilities often survive on fixed incomes, and to make matters worse, landlords often discriminate against them when it comes to choosing between two competing tenants.

Accessible affordable housing is one way to remedy that issue, and through a partnership with property development company LDG, that's just what SILCGA has been doing.

Phoenix Station, a new affordable housing project by LDG, will be an apartment complex in Decatur, just outside downtown Atlanta. It's located right next to MARTA's Kensington Station, a key amenity for low-income tenants who will likely rely on public transit. Construction is estimated to wrap up in 2024.

In the course of their community outreach about seven years ago, LDG made contact with SILCGA, which marked the start of a long consulting relationship.

"Our conversations with SILC really deepened our understanding about

how affordability and accessibility overlap," Chris Byrd, LDG's director of development in the Southeast, said.

Affordable housing efforts often face community resistance in the form of NIMBY complaints, which means "not in my backyard." SILCGA was a strong voice in community meetings for Phoenix Station, educating people on the benefits of affordable housing and pushing back against the complaints.

By regulations, 5% of affordable housing developments must be mobility-accessible units, while 2% must be hearing/visually-accessible units. LDG estimates Phoenix Station will be 30% accessible when complete, with 100% of units able to be modified for accessible needs. The change reflects how accessible design should be, SILCGA Executive Director Shelly Simmons said.

"Whether you may have to have an elderly parent come to stay or visit, it's helpful," Simmons said. "Whether a child may have broken a leg at a soccer game, it's helpful. So not only is it for people with disabilities, it's universal. And I think if we take that concept, people will see that it's much easier and again, just doing the right thing to have



Rendering of future Phoenix Station housing development..

accommodations and modifications, and just the complete development already in place. And I think that just bringing people together is always a good thing.”

Visitability, the ability for people with disabilities to visit even units that are not designated as accessible, was also important to the project. Elevators serve the entire seven-story Phoenix Station complex, allowing for a greater sense of access and community.

“Everyone should be included in daily activities, as far as visiting neighbors and friends, and not have to be centrally located, with everybody in one area,” Simmons said. “A person with a disability or a senior would want to be able to get around someone’s residence, to interact and to mingle. And so you think about things like that, not to be excluded or segregated, in a way, that is good for your mental health.”

Moving forward, LDG plans to keep consulting with SILCGA as an expert source on accessibility in their developments. The principles of affordable accessible housing have already influenced the planning phases of several new properties.

“So many times in our industry, accessibility has been a box to check,” Byrd said. “And as developers and as owners, sometimes we lose sight of the people that we’re serving. And it’s just important to get to know folks.”

Applications for residency at Phoenix Station will open in December. While SILCGA can’t reserve places for the people they need to house, CILs will begin encouraging eligible consumers to apply for Phoenix Station housing alongside their usual Section 8 channels.

Personally, Byrd says that learning about accessibility has changed the way he looks at his job. While making housing accessible was always important, now it’s something he’s thinking about nearly as much as making housing affordable.

“It’s really important to understand what accessibility means. It means dignity, it means maybe somebody has a little bit easier of a day,” Byrd said. “I think we’re always trying to look for ways and embracing opportunities to make people’s lives a little bit easier”.



Fighting For Those Who Care: Caregiver Advocacy at Caring Across Generations

Caring Across Generations | Metro Atlanta

“Without caregivers, a lot of people with disabilities would be institutionalized or placed into nursing homes. So the caregiver actually helps provide independent living for people with disabilities.”

Caring Across Generations is a nationwide organization focused on providing healthcare infrastructure for people with disabilities, often age-related, to continue to live at home with the help of caregivers.

Maria del Rosario Palacios is a senior organizer at Caring Across Generations. She grew up undocumented, living with a disability throughout her school years and struggling to find care. Now, she’s an activist and a caregiver for her mother, her spouse and their son, who was recently diagnosed with autism. Her organization has spearheaded the work of the Care Can’t Wait coalition, which pushes for home and community-based services, or HCBS, for people with disabilities. This aligns directly with SILC’s mission to enable people to live independently, executive director Shelly Simmons said.

“Without caregivers, a lot of people with disabilities would be institutionalized or placed into nursing homes,” Simmons said. “So the caregiver actually helps provide independent living for people with disabilities ... Having a caregiver that will

help with daily activities as far as getting up, getting dressed, taking them out for just social activity is absolutely key.”

Care Can’t Wait has a lot of work to do in Georgia, where despite having a strong federal program in SILCGA, state laws often lag behind best standards and practices for care. “A lot of folks are usually surprised that we don’t have more protections [for caregivers],” Palacios said. “For instance, we don’t have a permanent paid leave policy. There was a bill in 2017 that made it so that employers who do have paid time off would allow their employees to use up to five days for sick family members. That expired last year, and this year it was brought up again, and it’s now waiting for the governor to sign off on it.”

Governor Brian Kemp has since signed that bill, the Family Care Act, into law, though he also vetoed a budget that included a \$6 pay raise for professional caregivers. Such obstacles to equality are often a matter of advocacy and education. Disability advocacy is also a key aspect of the work at Caring Across Generations. Their broad focus makes for a more complete approach to helping



people live independently. “It’s hard to navigate the waiver program in Georgia,” Palacios said. “That is one of the biggest ways that folks with disabilities benefit from the advocacy work we’re doing ... If we expanded the funding for HCBS, it would really fill in the gaps that folks need just to get through the day.”

For more information on the people at Caring Across Generations and the work they do for Care Can’t Wait, visit www.carecantwait.org.

SCAN
TO HEAR THE
FULL STORY



Excerpted
from
SILCGA's
Podcast





Myles Green self-advocating at the Georgia State Capitol.

Advocating for IDD Legislation with Unlock 2.0

“We’re thrown into the deep end in a system that’s not always family-friendly or easy to navigate.”

Unlock 2.0 is a coalition fighting for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (like Down syndrome, autism or long-term complications from preterm births) to get the services they need to live the fulfilled, flourishing lives they deserve.

Rita Young is the grassroots engagement director for Unlock 2.0, and, like many advocates, she has a personal connection to the struggle for disability rights. Young has been working with nonprofits for over 20 years, inspired by her two sons, who have autism. Their healthcare journey was often challenging, she said.

“We’re thrown into the deep end in a system that’s not always family-friendly or easy to navigate,” Young said. “If you meet an individual with a developmental disability, and their family members as well, a lot of times, folks are incredibly resourceful. We learn how to be very resourceful, and still, it’s difficult.”

The goal of advocacy is change – social, economic or legal. That change is best fought for at the state Capitol, where Unlock 2.0 makes direct arguments for their cause.

Myles Green, a young man living with an IDD, testified with Unlock 2.0 in front of the state House and Senate. He wasn’t nervous at all, he said, but excited for the chance to tell his story to legislators who could address the problems he faced.

“I had three messages for them,” Green said. “I was there to ask them to unlock the waiting list, I was there to ask them for an increase in pay for direct support staff, and I was there to ask for a waiver for myself and others that have waited just like me, because we deserve something to look forward to every day.”

Green said the Senate, at the end of a long day of testimony, cut his story off before going to recess, while they let others before him run over their allotted time. He plans to testify again and deliver his entire message next time.


Unlock 2.0’s efforts got 500 IDD waivers and a modest wage increase for support staff added to this year’s budget. It was less than what they requested, but still, Young said, it matters.

“Advocacy is a long game,” Young said. “You win some, you lose some. You come back to the drawing board, and you just pick yourself up and keep going. There’s just so many people that are counting on services and funding. I think it’s those folks, too, knowing that they’re out there, that also really makes a difference for me.”

For more information on Unlock 2.0 and their fight for life-changing legislation, visit unlockgeorgia.com.

SCAN

TO HEAR THE
FULL STORY



Excerpted
from
SILCGA's
Podcast

Accessibility



NOW!

To whom.

The Neal family truly
was bless by DRC
to build the deck and ramp
The Contractor was extra nice
And did a fabulous job.
Great work. Didn't leave
a mess. The Staff treated
us with kindness and Courte and respect
to help us.

Now my mother Lula can
sit on the deck and enjoy the day and flowers
Roll off when she get ready
with the wheel chair or the ramp
She feel's very safe now.
We are so happy just
don't have the word to express
our gratitude. Thank all who
was involunt with the
paper work. We have been bless and DRC was
a God answer.

Thank you
Lula / Mary Ann Neal

Success story handwritten letter from
consumer.

Disability Resource Center | Demorest, GA

Home Access Program Success Stories

“Mrs. Bringman is able to access the home and community safely and independently without worries. She was so happy for the ramp that he thanked everyone involved in getting this done.”

Disability Resource Center | Demorest, GA

BL is thankful for the stair lift that she was able to procure via DRC. BL's bedroom suite is on the second floor of her home. BL has had several stair falls resulting in a broken neck in one instance and broken ribs in another resulting in her nursing home stay. Due to her falls, she has been forced to sleep in her living room for safety's sake. She is grateful for the freedom and safety that the stairlift brings to her home. Her son stated that “this is the surest way to keep his mother safe at home and out of a facility.” BL feels blessed to have the help to stay in her home and a family that is working to support her independence. A stair lift isn't just a way to gain access to a second floor, it is the ability to return to the sanctuary of her own room without the fear of another fall. It is freedom and independence and BL is appreciative of DRC's support.

Access 2 Independence | Macon, GA

The last several months Access 2 Independence and SILC/HAP has helped a great amount of people in the community. Both agencies have been working with Mrs. Bringman. She had spent many years dealing with Multiple Sclerosis and Arthritis which has become unable for her manage her mobility. All Mrs. Bringman wanted to do is keep her independence by getting her current ram repaired so she could continue

go out and seeing her family and enjoying community events.

Mrs. Bringman had tried to do it herself and get the ramp repaired but she ended up being lied to by the people who said they would repair her ramp. The ramp she has was not ADA compliant and he had some issues by falling while using the ramp. Mrs. Bringman decided to take action and call for some assistance for herself. Then she called Access 2 Independence, and I began to explain about the A2i program and the SILC Independent Living Center

Mrs. Bringman lives in Cordele, Ga and that is in Crisp County which resources are very scarce. So Ai began the process to help Mrs. Bringman achieve her goal. Once we received the necessary documents we proceeded to get her ramp repaired. Access 2 Independence & SILC had successfully repaired her ramp and made it ADA compliant.

Mrs. Bringman is able to access the home and community safely and independently without worries. She was so happy for the ramp that she thanked everyone involved in getting this done. Mrs. Bringman especially to this day she calls me and thanks me and the SILCGA in helping her keep her independence.



Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia

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