



GCD: Governor's Council on Disability

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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

GCD Director's Report

by Amy Bledsoe

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GCD Executive Director, Amy Bledsoe

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD). My name is Amy Bledsoe. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and am nearing completion of my Masters in Business Administration. I am a perpetual student. I enjoy learning something daily. My most prized role in life is as a mother to four amazing children ages 21 to 13. My husband and I have been married since 1994. I serve on my local school board and enjoy volunteering for education and safety throughout the state of Missouri. I am a cancer survivor. I also volunteer for several groups in the community in which we live. I enjoy working in the yard and playing with my young Saint Bernard, in addition to spending time with family and supporting our children in their activities.

Although I've only been with the office for a short time, it has been full of excitement. Claudia Browner served as interim director and has continued to assist in the transition. She remains busy and dedicated to the GCD. Judy Grainger accepted a new position with another agency. She did take care of the Abilities First Transition Event in Springfield for the team. Laura Mueth has remained busy with the legislative updates, providing training, and taking care of exhibits at various events.

As we work on filling the position of Disability Program Specialist, many are pitching in to cover in preparations for the 2017 Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). The volunteers on the steering committee have continued to work hard to ensure the success of the event. The speakers and DJ have been confirmed. The committee is in the process of confirming 32 delegates for the event. Donations and support are pouring in including a donation of a professional team to film parts of the event and create a Good News video for GCD to share. The video team services are being donated by the Missouri School Boards' Association. A number of Representatives and Senators have been invited to attend the legislative day of the event.

Mr. Scott Turk and Governor Greitens are looking forward to working with our office and council. Vacant council seats are in the process of being filled. GCD is also working with Treasurer Eric Schmitt regarding educating citizens on MO ABLE. The roll-out is scheduled for April 24th.

GCD team members have been participating in many meetings, trainings, and events. The annual awards were presented to the 2016 award winners at the Missouri Assistive Technology Conference. We continue to provide technical assistance to individuals throughout the state. There are many pending events, presentations, and trainings for the GCD team. Priorities include the YLF, forging strong relationships with key stakeholders including elected officials, departments, and non-government agencies and entities. Improving safety and crisis plans for businesses, schools, and communities to include plans for individuals with disabilities is a priority as is assisting state government departments to improve access to websites.

2016 GCD Awards presented at Power Up

by Claudia Browner

A panel of judges representing Council members and state liaisons selected the winners of the annual Inclusion, Youth Leadership, and Website/IT awards from many highly qualified nominations. The winners of the 2016 GCD Awards, who exemplify standards of excellence in enhancing life for individuals living with disabilities were presented with their awards at the Power Up conference in Columbia on April 4.



2016 **Inclusion Award** winner: UD for Yoga in Kirkwood

Natasha Baebler is a yoga teacher and special educator successfully working and running her own yoga business, UD for Yoga, as a person with disabilities. Her innovative and accessible approach to yoga makes it accessible to people with all ability levels. Baebler has been specifically trained and built her business to teach yoga to children and adults with varying support needs, including visual impairments and children who use wheelchairs. Baebler is an excellent role model for inclusion and an example of living a full life despite her disabilities.

Honorable Mention: Art Inspired Academy in Springfield

Art Inspired Academy (AIA) provides inclusive creative arts opportunities to children and adults, both with and without disabilities in the community. Through partnerships with the Springfield Boys and Girls Clubs, AIA provides art and theater classes to children with and without disabilities. For many of the students, these classes have been the first time they have had interaction with someone with a disability or a different background. AIA has also formed a partnership with Pigtails and Crewcuts, a local children's salon that accommodates children who have trouble getting their hair cut due to sensory issues. AIA music and theater classes are held at Drury University, where students and volunteers work together to write and perform two productions a year, which are open to the public.



4th Annual **Youth Leadership Award**: David Vetor

David Vetor serves as the Student Government Association president for the Florissant Valley campus of St. Louis Community College. He is very passionate about students with disabilities having the access they need to ensure academic and social success on campus. Vetor takes great pride in his academic excellence and encourages others to use the support services available to them. As a representative of the deaf community, Vetor volunteers with the Deaf Communication Studies Program. He created a community college recruitment video and acted in college theater productions. His most recent focus is working to make the college emergency alert system more accessible.



1st Annual **Website/IT Award**: Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living, St. Joseph

Midland Empire Resources for Independent Living (MERIL) is a center for independent living committed to removing barriers for persons with disabilities and the aging in northwest Missouri, serving nine counties in the region and providing cross-disability services in areas such as advocacy, peer support, independent living, information and referral, and transition. MERIL's website is designed to be accessible to all, including people with visual impairments who are using a screen reader or other forms of assistive technology. It allows changes in font size, high contrast, and translation capabilities. Closed caption of videos and audio content make the website accessible to people who are deaf or hearing impaired. Overall, the website is user friendly and easy to navigate.



Photos from top: Natasha Baebler accepts the Inclusion Award from Amy Bledsoe; Amy Bledsoe presents the Honorable Mention to Art Inspired Academy staff Jamie McGranahan, Richard White, and Jane Gordon; David Vetor accepts the Youth Leadership Award from Amy Bledsoe; MERIL staff Paul Bergonzoni and director Rob Honan accept the Website/IT Award.

Meet Council member Chip Hailey

by Claudia Browner

Chip Hailey (pictured on right) was appointed as a Council member on January 6, 2017. He works as a Public Policy Advocate for The Independent Living Center, Inc. in Joplin, Missouri. In addition to being an advocate for people with disabilities, he has been a licensed ordained minister since 1982.

Hailey does a two hour weekly internet radio program with another visually impaired friend, Denny Huff, Missouri Council of the Blind president, and Director of Gateway for the Blind. The program is called The Gospel Jubilee where they play songs from today's and yesterday's Southern, bluegrass, and country gospel.

The program was first aired on the American Council of the Blind's (ACB) internet radio back in April of 2014. The first broadcast was an hour long program but was promoted to a two hour program the following week.

They share interesting facts about the artists and groups that they feature each week as well as play gospel songs in keeping with any special holidays such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Christmas and Easter, etc.



Successful Disability Rights Legislative Day

by Laura Mueth

Three hundred ninety-two disability advocates from all over the state, representing a variety of organizations came to the Capitol on March 15 for Disability Rights Legislative Day.

Speakers and legislation highlighted during the event centered on the "We Choose Inclusion" theme. Speakers were Senator Scott Sifton discussing Senate Bill 203 and the MO HealthNet Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities program, Attorney Elizabeth Moran and Representative Jim Neely focusing on House Bill 626 and needed changes for Missouri's guardianship statute, and self-advocate Patty Goss and Brian Colby from the Missouri Budget Project addressing the potential changes to MO HealthNet and the services and supports Missourians with disabilities need in order to live the lives they desire. State Treasurer Eric Schmitt participated via a recorded video message providing an update on the Missouri Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) program.



The event was emceed for the first time by Emilio Vela, Chief Executive Officer of Southwest Center for Independent Living. His message was one of continuing to communicate with legislators past the event reminding the audience that it is a marathon. Individuals and groups met with senators and representatives after the "rally" portion of the event to discuss those bills which impact them.



Photos: (Left) Emilio Vela addresses the crowd in the Capitol rotunda; (right) The Disability Rights Legislative Day audience is seated in the capitol rotunda.

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability Members

- Yvonne Wright, Chair, New Bloomfield
- Joan Bergstrom, Ed. D, Lee's Summit
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Ronald Hack, St. Louis
- Chip Hailey, Joplin
- Mary Ann Harter, St. Louis
- Rosemary Hendon, West Plains
- Todd Mayfield, Jefferson City
- DeAnna Noriega, Columbia
- Susan Orton, Creve Coeur
- Derek Smith, Osage Beach
- James Trout, St. Louis
- Robert Wallace, St. Louis

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability Staff Members

- Amy Bledsoe, Executive Director
- Claudia Browner, Office Manager
- Vacant, MO-YLF Coordinator
- Laura Mueth, Legislative Coordinator

Spotlight on Wolfner Library

Wolfner Talking Book and Braille Library provides leisure reading audio, braille, and large print books to visually impaired and physically disabled Missouri citizens of all ages.

Wolfner Library offers more than just books by mail. Other services include:

BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download): BARD is the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) audio book download website. Patrons can download books directly to a blank cartridge provided by Wolfner Library for their talking book machine or use the Apple, Android, or Kindle Fire app to download audio books directly to their mobile device.

Locally Recorded Books: Wolfner Library records books about Missouri, with a Missouri setting and/or by a Missouri author.

Print/Braille Books: Print/Braille children's picture books allow a visually impaired child or adult to read with a sighted individual. They are great for story times!

Reading Programs: Wolfner Library offers a youth summer reading and an adult winter reading program each year.

Book Clubs: Wolfner Library patrons 18 and older may participate in call-in book clubs. Call to learn more about the latest selections for our fiction, non-fiction and mild read clubs!

Follow Wolfner Library on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/wolfnerlibrary>) to learn about new services, changes in services and to sample the titles offered.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Wolfner Library at wolfner@sos.mo.gov or (800) 392-2614.



Upcoming Events

- Launch of MO ABLE Program in Missouri—April 24, 2017 at Paraquad, St. Louis
- Missouri Youth Leadership Forum—July 18-22, 2017 at MU, Columbia
- Missouri Advocacy Summit—October 7, 2017 Save the Date!