

OFFICE OF HANDICAPPED CONCERNS

WILL'S CORNER, OKLAHOMA



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April, 2004

(Serving the Disability Community of Oklahoma)

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As the recent budget crisis the state has faced passes, we have heard many say that state agencies must do more with less. However, I would argue the point that state agencies must perform our tasks efficiently to complete our mission within budget. One of the strengths of OHC continues to be its flexibility in service delivery. Consequently, appropriated funds to the Office of Handicapped Concerns have been retained in areas that will promote services to consumers. *Your satisfaction is our top priority at the Office of Handicapped Concerns.* This office still maintains an agency priority to provide accurate, up-to-date information in a timely manner. We invite you to contact us on our website www.ohc.state.ok.us or to use our toll-free number 800-522-8224, 405-521-3756 in the OKC metro.

Steve Stokes, Director

OHC web site:
www.ohc.state.ok.us

HOUSING BULLETIN

You are reading about it here. This is the place where the news reaches the public for the first time. Have you ever wanted to get some information about housing and didn't know where to go? Do you know your rights on housing? Have you ever wanted to know how you would approach one of the Native American tribes for information about housing? Have you ever wanted to know where you could go to get a room added onto your home for a disabled family member? Give us a call, and we'll send you our latest state publication on *Housing*—all the ins and outs of a rather complex subject which we have tried to simplify for your benefit.

The Office of Handicapped Concerns has developed a state publication that will answer your housing questions. This is in keeping with the **mission** of this agency to provide information and referral to citizens of Oklahoma on disability issues. There is no doubt that affordable, accessible housing is a major concern for Oklahomans. If you want to know about housing, we have the state publication for you which will bring together the many sides of this complex issue in a very readable and uncomplicated manner.

So, what kind of information can you look to receive from this *new* publication? We're going to tell you about alternative housing options like group homes, long-term care facilities, and assisted living facilities in Oklahoma. We're going to tell you about programs in Oklahoma

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HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA)

In the October, 2003 issue of *Will's Corner, Oklahoma* which was published on the internet, we brought you some information about the Help America Vote Act with an interview with Michael Clingman who is the Oklahoma State Election Board Secretary. Michael Clingman oversees federal, state, and local elections across Oklahoma. Just to recap the highlights of that article, HAVA is Congress's effort to establish a uniform way to vote nationwide. HAVA instructs states after 2007 to purchase only accessible election systems with money provided by HAVA. It directs that by 2006 there will be at least one accessible voting machine in every single polling place in the nation.

Michael Clingman and I discussed accessibility of polling places in Oklahoma, and he told me that "91% of polling places in Oklahoma are accessible." This is based on self reporting from the local polling places to the Oklahoma State Election Board. But, are 91% of all polling places truly accessible to you? What is your experience when you go to vote? How do the voters themselves actually rate their polling places? We don't know the answer to that question yet, but we are going to get a chance to find out beginning right now. Let's see how.

A federal grant has allocated money to Oklahoma for polling place accessibility, and our state protection and advocacy agency (**the Oklahoma Disability Law Center, Inc.**) is offering you a chance to evaluate your polling place. Are polling places accessible to individuals with a full range of disabilities including visual impairments, hearing impairments, and mobility impairments? Is the privacy and independence of people with disabilities considered in the overall voting experience? Does your precinct have a curbside voting plan, and if so does that procedure meet your needs?

You may need a few tools to help you get some real information on the accessibility of your polling place. Here are some helpful things:

- **A copy of a survey form** (There are several available.)
- **A writing tool**
- **A measuring tape**
- **A digital (or other) camera**
- **The curbside voting plan for your polling place**

**...are 91% of all
polling places truly
accessible to you?**

Here are some things to look for at your polling place. **What is the parking situation at your polling place?** Is there a ratio of 1 to 25 handicapped-accessible parking places? Are these places clearly marked with upright signs? Is the parking place located as close as possible to the accessible entrance? Parking is very important to people with disabilities who may find it difficult to walk long distances.

How is the exterior route of the polling place from the parking lot to the entrance? Is it clearly marked pointing the way to an accessible entrance? Are signs legible to persons with limited vision? If curbs and stairs are present, are there also curb cuts and ramps to assist the person with mobility impairments? Is the exterior route on level and stable ground free of obstacles? These are some things to think about.

Is there an entrance which is accessible to people

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HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA) (continued)

with disabilities? Is the exterior door opened with a lever or loop-type handle to help people who have difficulty grasping? Is the handle mounted low enough to permit access to a person with a wheelchair? Are entrance thresholds raised which would make it difficult for a person in a wheelchair to pass through? If you can't get into the building, you're not going to be able to vote (unless you vote absentee or curbside).

Is there at least one voting booth accessible for people with disabilities designated by proper signage? Is there a shelf in this voting booth at a lower level to permit individuals in a wheelchair opportunity to vote? Is each voting booth well lighted? Is the accessible voting booth between 60 and 66 in deep, that is, between 60 and 66 inches front to back? These are some considerations for people with disabilities.

Do you have proper curbside voting in place? Do you have a poll worker stationed at or near the curbside voting area at all times? How are poll workers notified upon arrival of the voter needing curbside assistance? Polling places may literally be an obstacle course for an individual with disabilities, and many times the individual just gives up because casting their ballot is so difficult. Election officials will sometimes suggest you vote absentee and will give you the information on how to do this. Sometimes they will suggest that you can choose to vote at the county election board which is usually more accessible to people with disabilities. But shouldn't we also have the right to vote in the designated polling place for everybody in our precinct? Is it really true that 91% of our polling places in Oklahoma are accessible? What do you have to say about your polling place?

You may need to get a polling place accessibility survey form from the Oklahoma Disability Law Center. To do this, you may contact Melissa Sublet at 918-743-6220 or 800-226-5883. You may also download a more extensive polling place accessibility survey form from the U.S. Department of Justice website www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/votingscrn.

pdf. Remember that you will need some simple tools and information for the survey form. Taking pictures at your polling place will help to document accessible and inaccessible features. You may email digital photos to odlcokc@flash.net. You may send your completed survey forms and photos to:

Oklahoma Disability Law Center, Inc.
ATTN: HAVA Coordinator
2915 Classen Blvd., Suite 300
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106

It is good to be able to actually do something to improve your life. This accessibility survey may be a positive action that empowers us to take control of our lives. Improving our ability to vote will improve our collective voice in society. With the valuable information which you collect from polling places all over Oklahoma, the Disability Law Center will be able to better advocate for your needs.

P.S. When we look for problems, it is also good to look for solutions. There is a good website at www.inclusions.com which offers lots of ideas for improving accessibility in a variety of settings. If you have computer access, you may explore this website for more information.

HOUSING BULLETIN (continued)

which can help you to buy a home. We're going to tell you about places you can go to get help in paying your home utility bills. And finally, we're going to tell you about how the law affects you in housing issues. We will include a bibliography and helpful websites where you can get more information. **To reserve your copy**, call the Office of Handicapped Concerns at 800-522-8224 statewide or 405-521-8756 in the Oklahoma City metro. (Publication will be later this summer.) We will post the *Housing Publication* on our website at www.ohc.state.ok.us for your personal printing convenience.

SOME PROPOSED OKLAHOMA LEGISLATION

Affecting Individuals with Disabilities

The second half of the 49th Oklahoma Legislature has been in session since February 2 when Governor Brad Henry gave his State of the State speech to the joint session. A number of bills appear to impact individuals with disabilities. Let's look at a few of these:

Senior Citizens

HB 1818—An act relating to appropriations for nutrition programs for senior citizens.

Parity

HB 1835—Establishes the Oklahoma Task Force to eliminate health disparities.

Handicapped Parking

HB 1890—Allows certain disabled veteran plates to use handicapped parking.

Compliance

HB 2197—Assures state government compliance with accessibility laws.

Department of Public Safety

HB 2265—Modifies provisions for motor vehicles.

Consumer Directed Services

HB 2300—Creates consumer-directed services to Medicaid-eligible people with disabilities in order for them to live in the community.

City Ordinances

HB 2637—Authorizes municipalities to define what type of motorized vehicles will use city streets as long as such ordinances are not inconsistent with state law.

Tax Credits

HB 2659—Allows tax credits to families on ex-

penses for children with disabilities.

Golf Carts

SB 884—Authorizes golf carts and all-terrain vehicles to be operated on city streets.

Handicapped Parking

SB 899—Authorizes issuing disability placards by certain nurse practitioners.

Service Animals

SB 1402—Prohibits harming or killing service dogs used for the benefit of people with disabilities.

Information and Referral

SB 1405—Creates a statewide 2-1-1 helpline for information and referral on disability issues.

Golf Carts

SB 1461—Authorizes the operation of golf carts on city streets under certain conditions.

Golf Carts

SB 1493—Requires the Department of Transportation and Oklahoma Transportation Authority to erect certain signage under certain conditions permitting the operation of golf carts on streets.

These are some bills up for consideration this legislative session which may be of interest to you. These legislative bills are still alive as of the printing of this newsletter. If you have access to a computer, you may track these bills and all other proposed state legislation at www.lsb.state.ok.us. You may also contact your state legislators with your opinions on these bills and any proposed state legislation. Remember, if you don't know who your legislators are, contact the County Election Board of the county in which you reside, and they will provide you with legislators' names and contact information.

“Start by doing what’s necessary, and then do what is possible. Suddenly, you are doing the impossible.” St. Francis of Assisi

COMMUNITY INCLUSION (A New Traffic Signal)

All of us with disabilities are seeking a better quality of life for ourselves. For many of us that better quality of life is to be found in the community. In the Olmstead Supreme Court decision a few years ago, the court made that point and ruled in favor of two women with disabilities in the state of Georgia who were seeking services in the community rather than in an institution. The problem comes that the community has not been used to serving large numbers of people with disabilities and the structure is not always in place to make it possible for people with disabilities to access the services they need.

There is a new traffic signal out there now which has the potential to promote **integration** of people with disabilities into the community. It is called the Lewis Disability Signal Lens, and it is being tested at 5301 N. Meridian Avenue in Oklahoma City in an area with a high density of citizens with disabilities. Basically, the lens is a typical traffic light which has the universal symbol of disability, wheelchair Charlie, embedded in the light. The purpose of this light is to make motor vehicle operators aware of the presence of persons with disability in a traffic area. It can be used at a pedestrian crosswalk or at an intersection. The light can be activated by pushing a button, or it can be voice activated for a person who does not have use of their hands. This device will allow people with disabilities to feel safe on the streets of our community.

The Disability Signal Lens can be used in areas of high pedestrian usage or in places which have only an occasional pedestrian. Some areas where this device could be of particular service are near hospitals, shopping malls, grocery stores, schools, and entertainment and recreation settings. People with disabilities hesitate to walk or use their wheelchairs because they know their reflexes are slower. They feel unsafe crossing streets and intersections. Of course, pedestrians anywhere may feel unsafe in a society so geared to the automobile. The Disability Signal Lens could increase safety for all by signaling caution and allowing a longer "walk" period for the pedestrian at an intersection.

**...the Lewis Disability Signal
Lens ... is being tested at 5301 N.
Meridian Avenue in Oklahoma
City...**

There are two models of the lens. One has a single flashing amber traffic light with wheelchair Charlie above a yellow sign of an individual crossing a traffic area. This could be used at any crosswalk. The other model would be a red light with wheelchair Charlie attached to the traditional traffic light at an intersection. Both models would permit an individual with a disability to cross traffic areas safely. The National Safety Council reports that there are 77,000 incidents each year where a pedestrian is hit by a motor vehicle. Of that number, 22,000 resulted in death. The chances for a person with disabilities to be in one of these pedestrian accidents are much higher than the general population.

The Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, and Oklahoma ABLE Tech have publicly supported this Disability Signal Lens as standard traffic signage. Demetris Lewis, the Oklahoma inventor of this device, believes that it will promote implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. (The ADA is the *civil rights* law for people with disabilities and was signed by the first President Bush on July 26, 1990.)

Demetris says, "This lens will help to implement the ADA in our society by giving people with disabilities equal opportunity to get out in the community with the able-bodied population." Lenses could be placed on the back of school buses to alert motorists that children with disabilities would be exiting the bus. It's all about providing safety for people with disabilities to access their communities.

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THE FUTURE OF KIDS

What is the future of kids with disabilities? Did you ever think about that? Is the best they can ever hope for a life of quiet desperation? Do kids with disabilities have anything to contribute? What happens when they “graduate” from the public school? We didn’t used to even ask questions like that. We have opened our schools to kids with disabilities for more than 25 years now, but in reality we have not held any high hopes for them. In the past students with disabilities have been shuffled through school without fitting in anywhere and without expectations of success when they complete high school. Now we’re beginning to break out of the despair of a meaningless future. We are seeking public support for kids with disabilities. Low expectations are not enough. Let’s explore the winds of *change* in Oklahoma.

Last issue of *Will’s Corner, Oklahoma* we talked with Lathonya Shivers of the Developmental Disabilities Council in Oklahoma City about their new Youth Leadership Forum which will hold its first forum this coming June 21-25. This Forum is encouraging high school students in special education to consider their plans for the future. In the February, 2003 issue of *Will’s Corner, Oklahoma* we brought you information about the wonderful things the Yukon Public Schools were doing to transition students in special education into a meaningful world of work beyond their educational years. Now let’s look at the **Tech-Now** project.

Tech-Now is a project funded by the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council and the U.S. Department of Labor to encourage students with disabilities to think about their future. Tech-Now is in several schools in the Oklahoma City metro as well as in places like Cache and Clinton, Oklahoma. It begins to work with students as early as the 8th grade as an after-school program. Yes, you heard me. Students are so excited about Tech-Now that they volunteer to stay after school and sometimes the week-long summer program held at the University of Central Oklahoma.

What do they do? First students research into a ca-

Students are so excited about Tech-Now that they volunteer to stay after school and sometimes the week-long summer program held at the University of Central Oklahoma.

reer which interests them. What education, training, and experience does that field require? Students are encouraged to be future oriented and to think about what they are going to do when they get out of school. Then they get some skills which will help them do some of the research and learn how to work up a project about the career they have chosen.

Students work on all kinds of projects which reflect information about the career that interests them. One student chose to make a video with sound and pictures of the Oklahoma City bombing. In the video we see a series of pictures of the devastation in both Oklahoma City and the World Trade Center in New York with an overlay of voice and music used to explain the career of a rescue worker. That particular project won a first place in student competition. Not only did it win a first place, it inspired a young man who had remained pretty much by himself to work with others and develop leadership and problem-solving capabilities.

When students get excited about school, lots of other good things follow. Parents get excited. Agencies get excited. Government gets excited.

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THE FUTURE OF KIDS (continued)

The **Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities** sponsored an awards ceremony held in the Blue Room of the State Capitol on April 7 to honor students from the Tech-Now project. Parents were eagerly calling to ask who they could invite to see their child receive an award. Legislators were arranging their schedules to attend. Beaming students who had never dreamed of any future for themselves received encouragement. Their elders said, "We believe in you." This is the message we want to get out to students with disabilities. You have something to contribute, and we want to help you find out just what your gift is.

If you are a student, a family member, a special education teacher or a school administrator, you may be interested in having the Tech-Now program in your school. Tech-Now can pay for computers and teacher time for the after-school program. Schools pay for classroom space and transportation to on-site visits when students visit businesses in the community. Contact **Rick DeRenneaux at 405-499-4611 for more information**. Tech-Now reduces the drop out rate in special education. Students gain self esteem and problem-solving abilities as they seriously plan for their future. Yes, kids have a future ...**Kids are the future.**



Student Awards Ceremony at the Blue Room of the State Capitol

COMMUNITY INCLUSION (continued)

Safety is a subject of interest to us all. You may also want to discuss pedestrian safety for people with disabilities with city traffic engineers or school officials in your community. As more peo-

ple with disabilities choose to live, work, shop, and recreate in the community rather than an institution, we all need to look at inclusion and integration. What kind of infrastructure will promote this goal?

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May 12-14, 2004

35th Annual Special Olympics Summer Games, Stillwater on O.S.U. campus, attend or volunteer, contact 918-481-1234 or www.sook.org.

May 15, 2004

Heartland Council of the Blind will offer a workshop on coping with vision loss at the Library for the Blind (300 N.E. 18th Street in OKC), contact Vicky Golightly at 405-524-6227. (Registration limited to 50.)

May 20-22

NAMI (National Association for the Mentally Ill) will sponsor Oklahoma's 17th Annual State Conference entitled, *Recovery, the Big Picture* at the Clarion Meridian Hotel in OKC. Call 800-583-1264 for more information.

June 11, 12, 13, 2004

Endeavor Games at U.C.O. in Edmond, Oklahoma (Last year they had 270 athletes from 26 states and 2 foreign countries, events for athletes in a wheelchair, amputees, blind, or with cerebral palsy.) Contact Katrina Shaklee at 405-974-3144 for more information.

July 14-18, 2004

Make Promises Happen camp for youth ages 17-25 with all disabilities. Contact 800-299-2811 or 405-282-2811 for more information and cost. For a listing of all summer camps, www.centralchristiancamp.org.

If you have an event coming up relating to disability, let us know at 800-522-8224 and we'll help you publicize.

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