

The ABILITY LINK



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Social Media



@disabilitylink

www.disabilitylink.org

**Advocating for human rights,
not special rights**



Edited and Designed by William Daniels Social Media Specialist

The RESPECT Institute (RI) – The disABILITY LINK Chapter

Sharing a personal story is empowering for the teller and enlightening for the listener. A simple and effective idea developed by Joel Slack (after his experience of institutionalization) provides training and support for people with mental health disabilities to tell their personal stories. Since 2013 this opportunity has been offered through disABILITY LINK, the only place where this experience is available to the cross-disability community. The intention of the RESPECT Institute (RI) is based on the premise that once people hear the true stories and experience the “humanity” in those stories, understanding will be greater and the “stigma” or “shame” and preconceived ideas, commonly associated with being labelled with a disability, will be reduced.

Creating and delivering personal stories allows several things to happen for the story teller – there is a reported increase in confidence, self-respect, self-advocacy, self-determination and pride. Hearing personal stories allows several things to happen to the listener – recognition of the worth of everyone, noting the things we share in our lives, a better understanding of the experience of disability and a clearer impression how respect, or the lack of respect, impacts people.

The disability community benefits from the RI by the increased community involvement of people with disabilities, including improved peer support – sharing one’s own story makes us better peer supporters, by offering the benefit of our experiences – and increases the sense of cross-disability pride and support. The general community benefits from hearing the personal accounts of living with a disability, it reduces myths and misunderstandings and replaces them with appreciation and insight – acknowledging, honoring and valuing, often painful, personal stories has a significant impact on teller and listener.

The four-day training provides support and guidelines for each participant to construct their own story, facilitators and peers provide feedback until succinct and meaningful stories are ready to share with the greater community (if the RI graduate chooses to do so). Personal stories have been delivered to great effect in diverse venues such as; civic organizations; university classrooms; service provider agencies, medical settings, employee trainings; legislative and policy activities; board meetings; fund raising events, etc.

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For the past eight years, disABILITY LINK has hosted RI training sessions each year for about 10 participants each time. Since 2015, graduates of those sessions hosted by disABILITY LINK have been meeting together (usually quarterly) to provide peer support and share ideas about potential audiences for those who would like to share their stories; the graduates call this The disABILITY LINK Chapter of The RESPECT Institute, and it is the only regular gathering of RI graduates trained in Georgia. Graduates have helped to recruit for and host subsequent classes. In early 2020, disABILITY LINK hosted a class for RI graduates to further improve their skills.

In Georgia, the Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network (GMHCN) facilitates RI statewide (funded by The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities - GBHDD). More information about RI across the mental health disability community in Georgia is available at <https://www.gmhcn.org/respect-institute-of-georgia>.

disABILITY LINK continues to support The disABILITY LINK Chapter of The RESPECT Institute and plans to continue to provide the RI training experience for the cross-disability community in Metro Atlanta. RI graduates interested in participating in the disABILITY LINK Chapter of the RESPECT Institute (see disABILITY LINK's monthly Dates-to-Remember for the most up-to-date information), or would like to be considered for any upcoming trainings, should contact Linda Pogue, Disability Rights, and Training Advocate, at GreenPogue@disABILITYLINK.org.

Article by Linda Pogue



Assistive Technology

Nearly every American uses technology to make life easier. For people with disabilities, however, assistive technology is more than a luxury...it is an essential tool for independence! Assistive Technology (AT) is any item or piece of equipment used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of life, including at school, at work, at home, and in the community. Assistive Technology ranges from low tech to high tech devices or equipment. In 1988 Congress passed a law called the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act (known as the Tech Act). This law provides all states with funds to address assistive technology needs.

There might be questions asked to disABILITY LINK staff such as, What type of Assistive Technology do you have in your center?

Low tech AT are devices or equipment that don't require much training, may be less expensive, and do not have complex or mechanical features. For example:

- handheld magnifiers
- canes or walkers
- reachers/grabbers
- specialized pen or pencil grips and much more

High Tech AT refers to the most complex devices or equipment that have digital or electronic components, may be computerized, will likely require training and effort to learn how to use and cost the most. Examples include:

- Power wheelchairs or scooters
- Digital hearing aids
- Computers with specialized software such as voice recognition or magnification software
- Communication devices with voices
- Digi-drive technology (operating a vehicle with a joystick)

That kind of Assistive Technology might be provided by other agencies which we can be in contact with for the benefit of the consumer like Tools for Life or Georgia Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These are a few agencies that disABILITY LINK partners with.

If you or someone you know needs equipment, contact Angela Williams at awilliams@disabilitylink.org or (404) 687-8890 to learn about our loan program.

Article by Jacqueline Lopez

Five Core Services and ICWP Case Management

disABILITY LINK provides services to individuals with disabilities, and those services encompass five core services, advocacy, independent living skills, information and referral, peer counseling, and transition services. These five core services are an integral part of the Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) case management services offered by disABILITY LINK. ICWP is a waiver program that supports qualified individuals with physical disabilities who require the level of care of a hospital or nursing facility to live independently in their community by providing case management services, Personal Support Services (PSS), Emergency Response Systems (ERS), medical equipment and supplies and home modifications.

The ICWP case managers work with individuals and their families to advocate for the services and supports needed to be successful in their goal of living independently. Family support is essential for an individual's transition home from a hospital or nursing facility. Peer counseling affords individuals and family members an opportunity to have positive and responsive interactions with their case manager where needs and concerns can be discussed and addressed. Case managers coordinate program services by acting as a liaison between the individual, families, and providers to ensure that information regarding care and service are provided as indicated. With the implementation of the five core services to ICWP case management services, the individual's choice to live independently can be realized.

To qualify for ICWP, you must be between the ages of 21-64 when applying, have a severe physical impairment and/or Traumatic Brain Injury that limits one or more activities of daily living and requires assistance, be medically stable while being at risk of placement in a hospital or nursing facility and be safely established in a home or community setting.

For more information related to the Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) and/or obtaining Case Management services, please contact LaToya Lawrence, 404-687-8890 or llawrence@disabilitylink.org

Article by LaToya Lawrence



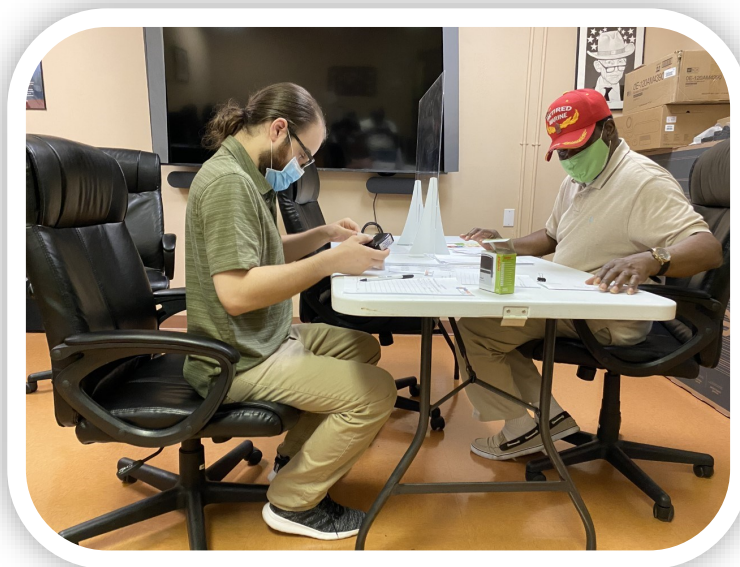
Volunteering

What does volunteering mean to you? Being able to give back to someone, give back to the community, and showing that you care. During these unexpected times during the pandemic, many people have come together to help each other by doing things as simple as delivering a meal, supporting the process of locating a place to stay, and providing face masks. Even though the pandemic is still going on, disABILITY LINK is here to serve our consumers and community.

Volunteers are essential in being able to do all we do. I know many people wonder what you can do to become a volunteer to help out. The first step is to contact me, James Turner, the volunteer coordinator, to get signed up to take the class and complete the necessary paperwork. I feel everyone has a unique skill that is useful for the volunteer program. We also offer ways to volunteer from home. Virtual volunteering is just as crucial as being here in the office.

As part of our volunteer program, we encourage ideas, peer support, and thinking outside the box. Won't you join us in making a difference in our community? For more information, contact James Turner at Jturner@disabilitylink.org or calling 404-687-8890.

Article by James Turner



Picture Description: Two Volunteers in disABILITY LINK's conference room putting together documents

Employment Program

The Employment program has been very eventful. A keystone part of the program is the "Locating Employment Avenues through Peer Support" (LEAPS) job readiness class, which happens every Tuesday from 10-11:30 a.m. The class is currently gaining more participants each week. The latest topics have included References, Staying Positive on the Job Search, Time Management on the Job Search, and Teleworking.

The participants are not only learning job search skills from the Independent Living Specialist, but are also providing peer supporting to each other in the job search. In addition to this weekly class, there is also a monthly class every third Wednesday of the month called "Getting Ready to Work". Topics in this class have included Setting Goals and Job Searching during COVID-19.

In addition to our consumer classes, we also held our Employer Quarterly Meeting in January, where we talked to different employers and service providers about the ADA and disability accommodations. We have also connected with some new organizations for possible internships and job placement for consumers. In the last few months, we have connected with Emory, Reside GA, Aspire, Texas Roadhouse Grill, Faith Staffing Agency, and have reconnected with the CDC. We are excited to continue putting people with disabilities back to work in real jobs and real careers.

For more information about how to join our classes, support our efforts, or join the employer network contact Katrina Parsons at kparsons@disabilitylink.org or call 404-687-8890.

Article by Katrina Parsons



Neighborhood Outreach

Our neighbourhood outreach tables continue to pop up throughout our service area to support you during COVID-19 and to learn about how to vote, our services, SNAP information, and so much more. We were able to procure thousands of masks to distribute to the community, and we are working with our network of community partners to make sure the protective equipment gets to the people who need it the most. In the month of March, we coordinated the delivery of PPE to get the masks to Meals on Wheels recipients in Fayette County, a Lunch program for Seniors, and an Assisted Living facility in Newton county. We're seeking to switch focus to make sure our smaller counties get what they need.

As we reach out to counties like Newton, Rockdale, Fayette, Coweta, and Henry, we're finding that many of the areas do not have events that provide resources so we are making sure to include them in the future. We are continually contacting volunteer coordinators, nursing facilities, and department directors, chamber of commences, grocery stores, and other community organizations in order to collaborate. We love doing the neighbourhood outreach events because we are able to safely meet face to face with each consumer.

Our newest outreach endeavors include trying to get out current information about the COVID vaccine and available testing and vaccine sites. We have a new date set for April 20th for our first vaccine clinic. Our hope is that with this information the disability community will not have to wait longer than necessary to receive care. W

In the meantime, If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to voice them in our daily COVID checkins Monday – Thursday from 3-4 on Zoom. We want to hear from you!

Article by Jamilah Shepard



Picture Description: Jamilah Shepard sitting outside of disABILITY LINK's office in front of a table with flyers on it holding up the peace sign.

Advocacy Leadership Training Days

Making our voices heard because disability rights are human rights.

disABILITY LINK is a community based, cross-disability center for independent living, which is about having choices and being in control over our lives. Advocacy is one of the foundations of independent living and means speaking up or acting for an issue, cause, or policy, which leads to the goal of self-determination. We provide encouragement and support for voting and political participation by informing, educating, and teaching advocacy skills for the consumer to make their decision to oppose or support any particular piece of legislation, candidate, or party.

In the November 2020 General/Presidential Election and the Senate Runoff Election on January 5th of this year, Georgia broke all existing voter turnout records due to registration efforts and increased early and absentee voting opportunities, and widespread use of drop boxes. disABILITY LINK and our partner agencies work tirelessly to maintain this momentum of civic participation in the disability community. The Georgia legislative session began on January 11th this year and ran for 40 non-consecutive days, ending sometime in April.

disABILITY LINK's Advocacy days and Leadership training days were conducted January through March and covered voting rights, healthcare, housing, and transportation. The training provided information on registering to vote, practicing advocacy skills to talk to legislatures, and discussing issues related to people with disabilities. Training included learning how to use different websites such as www.openstates.org to know who their senators and representatives are and their contact information. Trainings included videos, peer support, sharing of stories and information.

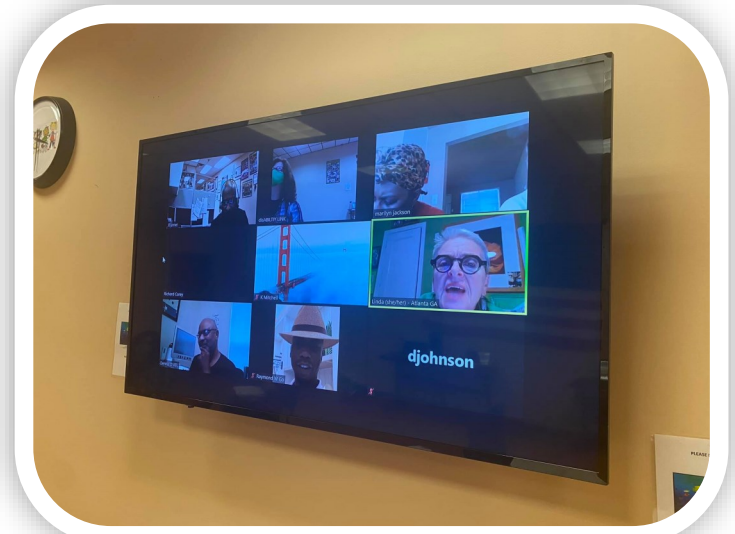
Several voting access bills were being proposed or had passed that disproportionately affect people with disabilities. We provided education, advocacy tools, and invited speakers from disABILITY LINK's partner agencies such as the ARC of Georgia and the Grassroots Voting Collective members to discuss how bills become laws and show examples of how to give a two-minute or less testimony in front of a committee. We explained how politicians' voting records are found at www.ballotpedia.org and about www.trackbill.com. Each time we had speakers, videos, articles, or links to important sites during our meetings, a follow-up email was sent to all participants.

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disABILITY LINK's Advocacy Days meetings also stressed that getting allies disABILITY LINK's Advocacy Days and leadership training was a huge success. It provided opportunities for individuals to gain peer support, learn skills, and support others in becoming involved in their community.

During this time, many other groups focused on the same issues, and we tried our best to make sure we supported their efforts and shared the information with everyone we could. We are only stronger together, and it takes more than one person to make a change. Most importantly, we spread the message that advocacy becomes a habit that we practice all year round and share with our peers. After all, we are the experts of our own lives!

Article by Nina Colman



Picture Descriptions: Megan Williams & Nina Colman sitting in disABILITY LINK's activity room doing disABILITY LINK's Advocacy Leadership Training with participants on zoom.

Youth

The month marks the Youth Transitions department's first venture into advocacy days. These were formally known as IL days at the capitol, but this year at least be known simply as Advocacy days to the youth. The students got an opportunity to speak to an actual legislator in a zoom experience sponsored by disABILITY LINK.

The event was held on one of 7 days dedicated to bringing public awareness to issues related to the disabled community. The students practiced questions they could ask that are related to transportation. They had questions such as: Can the state budget assist people with disabilities in using Lift or Uber and people who are on a fixed income? Will there be routes added to the outer metro area?

The group also met House representative Karla Drenner. In addition to the regular youth group participants, the students from the Atlanta Public School system joined. The students had been studying advocacy for a couple of weeks, and then they got to witness what it looked like when they advocate for others that they may not know very well or at all.

Article by Garrick Scott



Picture Description: Garrick Scott & William Thomas standing with William Thomas holding a cane.

COVID-19

With the new COVID-19 vaccines rollout, there appears to be a glimmer of hope that 2021 will see the end of the pandemic. The disABILITY LINK staff has been labeled as essential frontline workers for the purposes of the COVID-19 vaccine. We have provided information to our eligible consumers about getting the vaccine in their county should they decide they want it. Our CPRT team provided a presentation during our COVID Team Talk in January about how the vaccine works and what someone could expect from them. We will continue to keep our consumers informed on the vaccine and vaccine availability in the counties we serve.

We are continuing to provide peer support to our consumers with our weekly classes that run virtually Monday-Thursday. The purpose of this class is to combat the spread of misinformation surrounding the virus as well as provide support and an outlet to break social isolation through virtual interaction.

We are also continuing to host neighborhood outreach events where we provide information on upcoming workshops, COVID-19 programs, voter registration, and community resources. This quarter we have been focusing these events on the counties farther away from the center to ensure people with disabilities in all of our counties are supported. We are also placing a large priority on distributing masks and relevant PPE so that our consumers are adequately protected.

disABILITY LINK takes the health and wellness of our consumers and employees seriously. In an effort to protect everyone, our offices were closed with employees working remotely during the month of January and into mid-February. During this time our offices were professionally disinfected, and we have since returned to open up our office. Consumers and staff are required to follow CDC guidelines when in the office which includes masks, temperature checks, and consistent cleaning. We have continued to monitor the number of cases, hospitalizations, and vaccinations as we make our way into spring and will continue to make safety a priority.

Article by Margaux Officer

*Covid's a problem we've all reacted to with increased worry and concern for health and stability. Fortunately, the Biden Administration offers a new solution: an extended Covid special enrollment period to sign up for health insurance from now until **May 15th**.*

Go to **getcoveredamerica.org** and *localhelp.healthcare.gov* or call **1-800-318-2596** get free help in your area!

Gala 2021: Linking Together Through Changing Times

Mark your calendars for April 24 from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. as we socially gather together in celebration of another year fulfilling education, advocacy, mentoring and support of independent living!

This year's gala will be an in-person event. "Linking Together Through Changing Times" is what our CIL has been committed to since the pandemic began. By leveraging technology, and remaining flexible throughout these unpredictable months, we have continued to serve our consumers, advocate for the independent living philosophy, pursue transitional needs, and continue our commitment to supporting the personal choices of people with disabilities.

In light of the COVID-19 environment, this year's gala will be limited to 75 guests, with social distancing and health safety protocols in place. We hope you will be among us!

The event will again be held at the Courtyard by Marriott in Decatur; individual tickets are \$75 and various sponsorship opportunities – including web and social media presence opportunities – are available.

Despite our limitations on in-person attendance, we truly need your support as we continue to serve consumers. In 2020, amid a pandemic, disABILITY LINK served approximately 6,000 individuals in 22 service areas, providing critical information, resources, and services through accessible, remote technology, and in-person, when prudent. Unable to attend? Your donations will allow us to continue our momentum as this year's COVID-19 environment remains.

For questions about the event, tickets and sponsorship, or to make a general donation, please contact Lisa Parks at lparks@disabilitylink.org or by phone (678) 687-9542.

Thank you for your continued commitment to people with disabilities' goals!

Article by Lisa Parks

Executive Director Message

Dear Family and Friends,

As we continue to look forward to the spring and summer months, I would like to take a moment and celebrate the dedicated community that continued to stay healthy and to grow, even amid a global pandemic. Thank you for keeping the advocacy alive and continuing to move forward to ensure the rights of all.

disABILITY LINK continues to focus on equal rights. As part of that endeavor, here are five things we are looking forward to in 2021:

1. Equal access to voting in Georgia. We are committed to share information and oppose legislation that puts restrictions on being able to vote. disABILITY LINK remains an integrated partner in a variety of workgroups, advocacy events, and informational sessions. We will continue to provide educational information and advocacy on voting areas that will suppress Georgians' vote, specifically marginalized groups, including people with disabilities.
2. Affordable and Accessible Transportation. The pandemic has impacted the disability community in a variety of ways. Transportation is one area that was already a problem that has become even worse with shutting down and reduced public transportation schedules and bus lines. Accessible public transit continues to be a problem, with privately-owned companies such as UBER and LYFT not having accessible vehicles. disABILITY LINK will continue to have a seat at the table and invite you to also.
3. Affordable and Accessible Housing. Finding a place to live before the pandemic was hard enough. With the lack of in-person tours, people with disabilities often find themselves without seeing if the apartment or house is as accessible as usually told. The rising costs of housing, background, and financial requirements shut out many people with disabilities to find affordable housing. We will continue to work towards building relationships and advocacy to address this.
4. Employment. The unemployment rate before COVID-19 for people with disabilities was terrible enough, but since March 1, 2020, 1 in 5 workers with disabilities have been dismissed from employment, compared with 1 in 7 in the general population, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Before COVID-19, people with disabilities were already facing one of the lowest groups being employment. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 1 million U.S. workers with disabilities have lost their jobs since the outbreak pandemic in March. disABILITY LINK continues to advocate, educate, and work toward employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

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5. Diversity and Inclusion. Diversity and inclusion are one such defining issue. Although progress has been made towards equality across gender, race, and sexual orientation, one aspect of diversity and inclusion is too often neglected: disability. As an organization, disABILITY LINK is committed to inclusion that encompasses people, including people with disabilities from other marginalized communities and identities. disABILITY LINK continues to involve the community in the conversation with peer-led groups such as "Us Protecting Us" and intentional time and effort to educate ourselves and the community about diversity and intersectionality. We welcome everyone to join in on the conversations and help shape the opportunities and experiences and take an active role in building a genuinely inclusive environment.

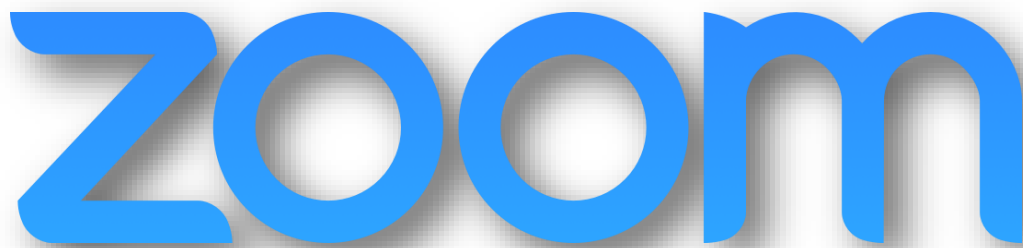
Like all good things, we know that 2021 will not always be easy. As I write this, COVID-19 cases continue to rise, but the end is in sight. Remember to continue to advocate, get vaccinated, and we look forward to seeing all your smiling faces in the office (we have missed you) and at our upcoming GALA.

Here's to a healthy and safe future!

Kim Gibson
Executive Director



Picture Description: Kim Gibson & Ken Mitchell standing outside of disABILITY LINK's office with The Faith Center receiving a donation



We are excited to announce that all of our classes held at disABILITY LINK are available through video conferencing. To participate outside of disABILITY LINK office join in from your computer, cell phone or landline phones. Webcams are not required but can be used for participation.

Join from a PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, or Android:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4046878890?pwd=dm9WTjA5aTBmMldscVplVTBqUzFSZz09>

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +16465588656,4046878890#

Or Telephone:

US: +1 646 558 8656

Meeting ID: 404 687 8890

Or by going to <https://zoom.us/> and click on join a meeting. Meeting ID is 404-687-8890 and password is 1901. Please note: All video conferencing is recorded. You can join in without signing up.

For additional information and accommodations please contact our office.



Please review the following list of dates for office hours, annual events, and office closings.

Normal Business Hours

Mon. – Thurs. 8:30 AM-4:30 PM

Fridays by appointment only

Workshops

Join us through audio and/or video conferencing for all our workshops

Join us

From personal computer, cell phone or landlines

By calling 1-646-558-8656 or by going to

<https://zoom.us/> and click on join a meeting.

Meeting ID is

404-687-8890 & password is 1901

Holiday and Office Closures

February 15th- President’s Day

May 31st- Memorial Day

July 5th- Independence Day

Sept. 6th- Labor Day

Sept. 26th through October 1st- Office paperwork catch-up

Nov. 2nd – Election Day

Nov. 11th – Veteran’s Day

Nov. 25-26th – Fall Break

December 20th through Jan. 2nd- Winter Break

disABILITY LINK is now an application site for SNAP (Federal Nutrition Assistance program). If you would like to learn more about SNAP, to be screened for eligibility, or to apply for food stamp benefits. Please contact our office at 404-687-8890 or visit our office.



Wish List:

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>QUANTITY</u>
Laptops	3
Youth Sponsorships	2

Youth Support for conferences – please contact staff for information!

Contact Us:

1901 Montreal Rd. Suite 102 Tucker, Ga 30084

404-687-8890 Voice

404-381-8117 Video

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