

The ABILITY LINK



disABILITY LINK Quarterly Newsletter

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Picture descriptions:

Shown is a group photo of the disABILITY LINK staff outside of our main office.

Social Media



@disabilitylink



**disABILITY
LINK**
the center for rights & resources

Edited and Designed by Jake Key, Program and Training Manager

2026 Empowering Our Youth Summer Program Off to a Great Start

The 2026 Empowering Our Youth Summer Program at disABILITY LINK is off to an exciting and successful start, welcoming a total of 17 participants during its first week. Led by the youth team, the program is already making a meaningful impact on the lives of youth participants through education, empowerment, and peer connection.

The week began with engaging discussions centered on the "Who, Why, and How" of Independence and Self-Advocacy. Participants explored the history and significance of the Independent Living Movement and learned about influential disability rights leaders whose advocacy paved the way for greater inclusion and accessibility.

Students were introduced to notable figures including Ed Roberts, widely recognized as the Father of the Independent Living Movement; Judy Heumann, whose lifelong advocacy and work highlighted in Our Fight for Disability Rights inspired generations of disability rights activists; and Constance Baker Motley, the trailblazing federal judge and civil rights leader whose work helped advance equality and justice for countless individuals.

As the week progressed, participants engaged in thoughtful conversations about careers, future goals, and personal interests. These discussions encouraged students to begin exploring career pathways while recognizing the importance of self-determination and independence in achieving their aspirations.

The week concluded with an interactive Peer Support Training facilitated by Linda Pogue, Trainer. Through collaborative activities and discussions, students learned the value of peer support, mentorship, and building positive relationships within their communities.

Cont. on page 3

2026 Empowering Our Youth Summer Program Off to a Great Start

Participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Students reported feeling enthusiastic about the program and expressed appreciation for the knowledge and skills they have gained thus far. Several participants shared that they plan to invite friends and classmates whom they believe would benefit from and enjoy participating in the 2026 Empowering Our Youth Summer Program.

With a strong first week behind them, the future looks bright for this year's participants. The Empowering Our Youth Summer Program continues to provide young people with opportunities to build confidence, strengthen self-advocacy skills, develop leadership abilities, and connect with peers as they work toward greater independence and success.



Image Description: Shown is the Summer Youth program learning about IL Skills and accommodations

Independent Care Waiver Program Continues Expanding Community Connections

The Independent Care Waiver Program (ICWP) and Community Health team remained actively engaged throughout the quarter, strengthening relationships with provider companies, community partners, and the individuals served.

Weekly community outreach efforts continued, with team members hosting information tables at local events to share resources, answer questions, and connect individuals with services that support independent living.

ICWP is a Medicaid waiver program that helps individuals with physical disabilities and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) live safely in their homes and communities rather than in institutional settings. Services include personal care assistance, specialized supplies, and home-based supports that promote independence and quality of life.

During the quarter, consumers and staff participated in a presentation from 180 Medical on available supplies and trial options. Additional meetings with provider companies and office visits helped strengthen partnerships and improve service coordination.

The individuals served through ICWP continue to show resilience and steady progress toward greater independence. A recent success story highlighted an individual thriving while living independently in the community.



Looking ahead, the ICWP and Community Health team remains committed to strengthening partnerships, expanding outreach, and supporting safe, independent living.

Image Description: Shown is two individuals visiting our outreach table, posing with peace signs and big smiles

Article by Shikha Desai

disABILITY LINK's DLENA Workshop

DLENA recently hosted a meeting featuring Steven Wagner from EEOC. Steven shared important information on current ADA trends, workplace updates, and considerations impacting both individuals with disabilities and employers. Attendees participated both virtually and in person, creating a valuable opportunity for learning and discussion.

DLENA meetings are held every other month to connect Employment Networks, community partners, and service providers. Our next meeting will take place on June 18 and will feature Claratel discussing mental health in the workplace. In place of an October meeting, DLENA will host its annual job fair supporting employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

During March, LEAPS focused on entrepreneurship, covering business planning, branding, and business development. The series concluded with an Entrepreneurship Showcase where participants presented the businesses they had been building. Due to the success and interest generated by the classes, entrepreneurship-focused LEAPS classes will now continue monthly, generally on the first Tuesday of each month.

Megan "Mo" from the Employment Department also attended the Career Exploration Event at the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf. Mo connected with students and community partners while sharing information on employment opportunities, workplace readiness, and available community resources. The event highlighted the importance of collaboration and continued outreach to support individuals with disabilities in achieving employment success.



Image Description:
A collection of photos of Mo Johnson running the disABILITY LINK table and exploring other vendor tables

Article by Chrisie Lee

On Aging Conference 2026

On Aging Conference, which is an annual conference hosted by the American Society on Aging, was held at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta from April 20-23 2026. Our ICWP and Community Health Supervisor, Katrina Parsons, participated in a day of this conference on April 21. There were many professionals in the aging field that attended this conference from all across the US.

The theme of the conference was The Power of Belonging. Katrina participated in sessions such as The Caregiving Divide, Connected Communities: Blueprints for Inclusive Aging and Disability Supports, Foundational Views of Aging: Combating Ageism through Children's Literature, HR 1 & The Future of Aging Services: Navigating Medicare, Medicaid, and Beyond and Building Action Steps with an Equitable Lens for Homelessness.

Katrina enjoyed talking with other conference attendees about the work that disABILITY LINK does and hearing from other attendees about their work on helping aging individuals gain and maintain independence. She also networked with many other companies at vendor tables such as The Alzheimer's Association, Homestyle Direct, LINET, Joy For All Companion Pets, and CircleID Companions and learned about their initiatives to support the aging community. There was also a cool celebration with music and snacks in the evening! She was proud to represent disABILITY LINK at the conference this year and learn more about ways we can impact the aging and disability community.



Image Description: Katrina Parsons standing in front of balloons and lighted block letters reading "On Aging"

Article by Katrina Parsons

CIL Connect Day, Bringing the Magic of *Wicked* to Life

disABILITY LINK recently hosted an exciting and inspiring CIL Connect Day, bringing together students, educators, families, and community members for a day filled with connection, learning, and fun. This year's event embraced the popular movie *Wicked* as its theme, creating an atmosphere of empowerment, friendship, and self-discovery.

Throughout the day, participants engaged in interactive activities, discussions, and opportunities to build relationships with peers and community partners. The *Wicked* theme encouraged attendees to celebrate individuality, embrace their strengths, and recognize that everyone has the power to make a positive impact in their communities.

Students from participating schools enthusiastically took part in the activities and showed great engagement throughout the event. Educators and school representatives shared overwhelmingly positive feedback, noting that students enjoyed the experience and benefited from the inclusive environment. Many commented on the value of connecting students with resources, peers, and opportunities that support independence and personal growth.

The colorful decorations, themed activities, and uplifting messages inspired by *Wicked* helped create a memorable experience for everyone involved. Participants left with new connections, valuable information, and a renewed sense of confidence and belonging.

disABILITY LINK extends its gratitude to the schools, students, staff, volunteers, and community partners who helped make CIL Connect Day a success. The positive feedback received from schools and attendees' highlights the importance of creating inclusive spaces where young people can learn, connect, and thrive.

As the spirit of *Wicked* reminds us, sometimes the greatest journeys begin when we embrace who we are and support one another along the way. CIL Connect Day was a wonderful example of that message in action.



Image Description:
Shown is Mo Johnson
roleplaying as the
mayor of
"Employability" while
teaching IL skills

Article by Antorius Merritt

The Anniversary of the Olmstead Decision: Freedom, Choice, and Community

What does it mean to truly belong in your community? For millions of people with disabilities, the answer to that was forever changed on June 22, 1999, when the United States Supreme Court issued its decision in *Olmstead v. Lois Curtis*. This historic ruling affirmed that people with disabilities have the right to live, work, and participate in their communities rather than being unnecessarily segregated in institutions.

More than two decades later, the Olmstead Decision remains one of the most significant civil rights victories for people with disabilities. It reinforced a simple but powerful idea; disability should never be a reason to be excluded from community life.

The case began when two women, Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson who had intellectual and psychiatric disabilities, challenged their continued placement in a state institution despite medical professionals agreeing they could live successfully in a community setting. Their courage and fight helped pave the way for a decision that continues to shape disability rights, independent living, and community integration across the country.

Today the impact of Olmstead can be seen in expanded access to community-based services, increased opportunities for independent living, and continued efforts to ensure that people with disabilities have the freedom to make choices about where and how they live. The work is not finished though.

Many individuals with disabilities still face barriers to accessible housing, transportation, employment, healthcare, and community supports. The anniversary of the Olmstead Decision serves not only as a time to celebrate progress but also as a reminder that advocacy remains essential.

As we commemorate this important milestone, we invite our community to reflect on the power of disability rights advocacy and the importance of preserving the freedoms secured through Olmstead. Every voice, every story, and every act of advocacy helps move us closer to a future where all people can fully participate in their communities.

Join disABILITY LINK on June 22, 2026, as we celebrate the Anniversary of the Olmstead Decision and honor the advocates, leaders, and community members who continue to champion independence, inclusion, and equal opportunity for all.

Article by Einisia Jones

Diabetes Prevention Testing

The Diabetes Prevention Program at disABILITY LINK is designed to help individuals better understand their risk for diabetes and develop healthy habits that can lead to long-term wellness.

The program begins with a simple risk assessment that looks at factors such as family history and other indicators that may increase a person's risk of developing diabetes. Healthcare professionals may recommend additional screenings, including glucose testing, a review of any history of diabetes during pregnancy, and the ADA/CDC Prediabetes Risk Test.

These screenings help identify risk factors and distinguish between the different types of diabetes, including Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, and gestational diabetes. Participants also learn about the A1C test, a blood test typically performed every three months that measures average blood sugar levels over time. Understanding A1C results can help individuals monitor their health and work with their healthcare providers to manage or reduce their risk of diabetes-related complications.

The Diabetes Prevention Program focuses on practical lifestyle changes that support healthier living. Participants learn how to make lower-fat and lower-calorie food choices, plan balanced meals using the plate method, read nutrition labels and monitor sodium intake, increase water consumption, improve sleep habits and incorporate regular physical activity into their daily routines.

Classes also include weekly wellness activities such as exercise sessions, walking, dancing, and the use of fitness equipment. Participants are weighed each Wednesday to help track progress and celebrate achievements along the way.

The program has already demonstrated impressive results. In 2024, participants collectively lost 135 pounds. Building on that success, the program continues to grow, with 11 active participants currently working toward their health and wellness goals in 2026. To encourage continued progress, awards will be presented to participants who achieve their personal weight-loss goals by December 20, 2026.

The Diabetes Prevention Program is more than a class—it's an opportunity to build healthy habits, gain support from peers, and take meaningful steps toward a healthier future. For more information, contact Juanita Anderson at janderson@disabilitylink.org.

Article by Juanita Anderson

Global Accessibility Awareness Day

On May 19th disability Link Hosted an event for Global Accessibility Awareness Day featuring guest speaker Danny Housley from the Shepherd Center. Consumers enjoyed learning about assistive technology resources and devices. Assistive technology is any tool that helps people live more independently. This can range from crutches and wheelchairs to high-tech brain computer implants. Assistive technology is a crucial resource to help people with disabilities live happy and independent lives.

Globally access to assistive tech is not equal. Developing nations face a great need for assistive tech and disability rights. Around the world, over a billion people who need assistive tech are unable to access it. This is due to many factors. An open discussion was held with consumers about how access can be increased. Ideas varied, like raising disability awareness, increasing funding for programs, and collaborations between Universities and providers.

Danny Housley gave a fascinating presentation on the Shepherd Center and Assistive Technology. Shepherd does great work in the community helping to give consumers a path toward independence. Shepherd has three separate assistive technology programs; Adaptive sports, Adaptive driving, and a Smart Home program. All the programs work directly with consumers to educate them on resources and how to use them. As Danny wisely said "Assistive technology is a skill, and we have to practice and learn how to use it."

In conclusion, the celebration was a great success. Educating consumers on global and local accessibility issues as well as resources. Many lively discussions were started about how we can work to improve accessibility for everyone. Thanks go out to Danny Housley and Shepherd for their fantastic and informative contributions.



Image Description:
Shown is a collection
of Shepherd Center
buildings

Article by Violet Rock

Susan M. Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame

disABILITY LINK is proud to announce that our Executive Director, Kim Gibson, has been inducted into the Partners for Youth with Disabilities Susan M. Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame – Class of 2026.

This prestigious honor recognizes individuals whose commitment to mentorship has created a lasting impact in the disability community. The 2026 theme, "Mentorship in Motion: Leading Together," celebrates leaders who empower others to find their voices, build confidence, and advocate for meaningful change.

Kim's induction reflects her longstanding dedication to peer mentoring and leadership development. Through her work at disABILITY LINK, she has created opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, consumers, staff, and emerging leaders to learn from one another, strengthen self-advocacy skills, and grow as leaders.

Her influence extends beyond Georgia through her involvement with the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders and the national network of Centers for Independent Living. Her commitment to mentoring others continues to inspire individuals to pursue their goals and make a difference in their communities.

We congratulate Kim Gibson on this well-deserved recognition and thank her for her continued dedication to advancing leadership, mentorship, and independent living for people with disabilities.

We would also like to recognize Abdul-Rakib Sualihu, a Mandela Washington Fellow, for nominating Kim and for carrying forward the values of mentorship and leadership through his own work.



Image Description:

Shown is an infographic that reads "Congratulations Dr. Kim Gibson" with a smiling headshot

Article by Cinque Singleton

A Night of Celebration, Connection, and Community

On April 25, disABILITY LINK hosted our Annual event at the Distillery of Modern Art, a unique venue that combines a working distillery with a contemporary art gallery. The beautiful setting provided the perfect backdrop for an afternoon of elegance, fellowship, and community engagement.

Each year, we feature an event either as a GALA or as a networking mixer. These events serve as an opportunity for consumers, staff, supporters, and community partners to come together and celebrate the accomplishments of individuals within the disability community while supporting the mission of disABILITY LINK. To make the event accessible to more consumers, discounted tickets were made available to any active or previously active consumers.

This year we had well over 150 attendees. Guests enjoyed a full meal while networking with friends, colleagues, and community members. The event also featured an awards ceremony recognizing outstanding achievements and contributions, a silent auction, an open bar, and an exciting 50/50 raffle. As the afternoon continued, attendees took to the dance floor and enjoyed music, conversation, and a festive atmosphere.



Image Description:

A collection of artwork for the silent auction, paintings of fruit, flowers, and a woman with flowers in her hair

Guests are encouraged to dress at their level of comfort, whether that means casual, business, or formal attire. Many attendees choose to wear fancy attire, helping to create an elegant and celebratory atmosphere where everyone can feel confident, connected, included, and respected.

The annual celebration continues to be one of disABILITY LINK's most anticipated events, showcasing the power of community, independence, and inclusion. We thank everyone who attended, volunteered, donated, and helped make this year's event a memorable success. We look forward to celebrating with you again next year!



Image Description:
Michelle Gavin posing as Ken Mitchell presents her award

Article by Jake Key

New Breeze Card

Reliable transportation is essential for maintaining independence and staying connected to our communities. Whether traveling to work, school, medical appointments, the grocery store, or social activities, having access to dependable transportation helps people with disabilities live active and fulfilling lives.

For residents of DeKalb, Fulton, and Clayton counties, MARTA Mobility provides transportation services designed to assist individuals whose disabilities prevent them from using the regular fixed-route bus and rail system independently. Eligible riders can apply for MARTA Mobility services, and the application process can be made easier with assistance from the dedicated staff at disABILITY LINK.

Once approved, riders may receive eligibility for one to three years, depending on their individual circumstances. An added benefit of MARTA Mobility eligibility is free access to MARTA's fixed-route bus and rail services.

MARTA has implemented new Breeze Card updates that may affect Mobility riders and bus passengers. If you still have an older MARTA Mobility card with a remaining balance, please contact MARTA Mobility Customer Service for assistance with transferring or accessing your funds.

In addition, changes to MARTA bus services and fare systems are currently being implemented. Riders may notice updates to cards, payment methods, or transit procedures as these changes continue to roll out. We encourage everyone to remain patient during this transition period and stay informed about any updates that may affect their travel. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Sheryl Hales at shales@disabilitylink.org or James Turner at jturner@disabilitylink.org.



Image Description:
Shown is the new,
orange Breeze card

Article by James Turner and Sheryl Hales

Employee of the Quarter

disABILITY LINK is proud to recognize Teri Beard as our Employee of the Quarter in appreciation of her exceptional dedication, professionalism, and commitment to serving our community.

As our Intake, Discharge, and Data Management Independent Living Specialist, Teri plays a critical role in ensuring that individuals seeking services receive a welcoming, accessible, and supportive experience from their very first interaction with our organization. Her attention to detail, organizational skills, and commitment to excellence help ensure that consumer information is managed accurately and that transitions into and out of services are handled efficiently and compassionately.

Teri's work often takes place behind the scenes, but the impact is felt throughout the organization. By maintaining vital data systems and supporting the intake and discharge process, she helps disABILITY LINK continue to provide high-quality services that promote independence, choice, and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Beyond her daily responsibilities, Teri consistently demonstrates a strong commitment to our mission and values. Her dedication to advancing independent living and connecting individuals with the resources they need makes her an invaluable member of the disABILITY LINK team.

Please join us in congratulating Teri Beard on this well-deserved recognition and thanking her for the positive difference she makes every day for our consumers, staff, and community.

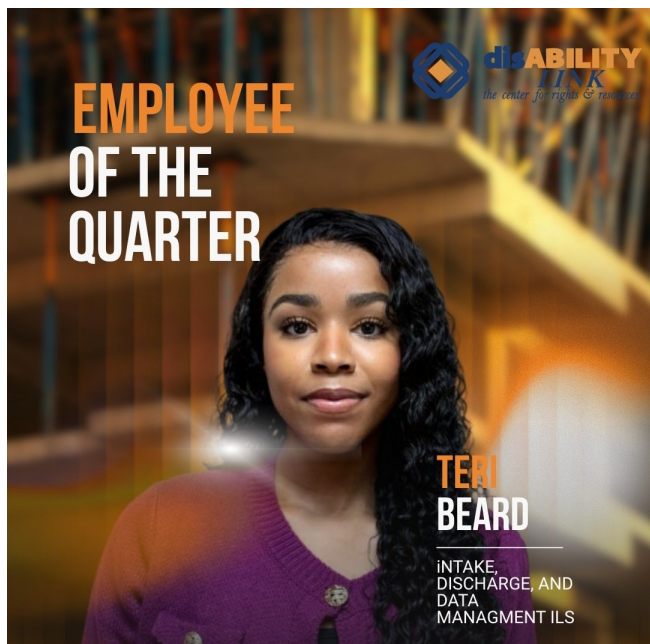


Image Description:
An info-graphic headshot of Teri Beard smiling that reads "Employee of the Quarter, Teri Beard"

Article by Cinque Singleton

Executive Director Message

Dear Friends and Family,

As summer continues, we are grateful for the opportunity to connect with you and celebrate the strength, resilience, and accomplishments of our community. Thank you for your continued support and participation in the programs and events that help make our organization a place of empowerment, inclusion, and growth.

July is an especially meaningful month as we celebrate the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA represents a historic milestone in advancing equal opportunity, accessibility, and civil rights for people with disabilities. While we celebrate the progress that has been made, we also recognize the importance of continuing to advocate for a more inclusive future.

As disability rights leader Judy Heumann said, *"Disability only becomes a tragedy when society fails to provide the things we need to lead our lives."** Her words remind us why advocacy, accessibility, and civic engagement remain so important.

With election season approaching, we also encourage everyone to prepare to vote. Voting is one of the most powerful ways to make your voice heard and support policies that affect our communities. Take time to verify your voter registration, learn about the issues, and make a plan to vote. As Justin Dart Jr. wisely stated, "Vote as if your life depends on it—because it does."

We are also excited to invite you to our Consumer Appreciation Event in July. This special occasion is dedicated to celebrating our consumers, families, and supporters whose involvement and dedication strengthen our community every day. We look forward to spending time together, sharing resources, and recognizing the accomplishments we have achieved collectively.

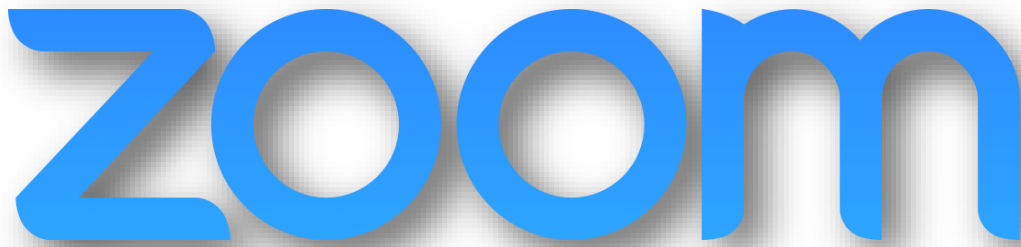
As we celebrate the ADA, prepare for upcoming elections, and enjoy the summer season, we encourage you to stay engaged through our workshops, programs, and community activities. Together, we can continue building a more accessible, inclusive, and empowered future for all.

Thank you for being an important part of our journey. We look forward to celebrating with you this July and continuing our work together throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Kim Gibson, DSW, LMSW
Executive Director

Written by Kim Gibson



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

June 19, 2026: Juneteenth

June 29th through July 3rd: Summer Break

September 24th through September 30th: Office closed for Staff Development and administration



Our Funding comes from different sources including grants, foundations, and fee for service programs.

"Funding provided in part by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners under the guidance of the Department of Community Development."



Supporters and grants:

P2P project: <https://gvs.georgia.gov/pathways-partnerships-grant-project>

Wish List

We are continually trying to address needs of consumers and rely on contributions. Some needs include: ***Gym equipment (bike) *Laptops *Meeting Supplies *Youth conference sponsorship *Silent auction donations *art supplies *and much more**

Consider donating to our general funding for all our programs:

<https://disabilitylink.betterworld.org/donate>

***Please note that BetterWorld offers an option to donate towards their platform, which does not go to disABILITY LINK. This is separate from the processing fee. If you do not wish to contribute to the BetterWorld platform, make sure to uncheck the donation box. However, if you are purchasing a ticket or registering for an event, the processing fee will apply.**

Contact Us:

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