

NJCDD

NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities

the Council

A publication of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities



“Community Conversations” Bridge the Gap Between People with Developmental Disabilities and Key Decision Makers

Throughout the spring, state lawmakers and other elected officials met with citizens with developmental disabilities, family members, and community providers to talk about ways in which New Jersey’s communities can be more inclusive.



Assembly Budget Committee Chair Louis D. Greenwald, D-6, at the Community Conversation held in Audubon.

These unique “Community Conversations,” sponsored by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, took place at local coffeehouses, where facilitators encouraged a candid dialogue designed to break down communication barriers and promote a better understanding among diverse populations.

“We are guiding a process that begins by reaching thought leaders and local decision makers in communities statewide, who directly influence public policy and thinking,” said Alison Lozano, executive director of the NJCDD. “They need to understand the intrinsic benefits of including people with developmental disabilities in the residential, economic, educational, and social fabric of our state.”

State legislators, freeholders, and mayors in New Jersey were invited to participate in the conversations, the first of which took place in Caldwell on March 23; the second in Kendall Park on April 20; and the third in Audubon on May 11.

The Community Conversations are part of a larger project designed to address negative stereotypes about people with disabilities, and to

continues on page 2

State Budget Woes Worsen

In mid-May, New Jersey Governor Jon Cozine outlined additional cuts needed to balance the state budget for the remaining weeks of the 2009 fiscal year, and announced further reductions to his 2010 budget proposal. According to the Department of Treasury, state revenues are down 40 percent below projections.



Even as advocates rallied outside the State House to protest cuts to sheltered workshop and supported employment services, and health care advocates joined forces at a press conference to oppose reductions in state support for insurance for children, poor families, the elderly, and people with disabilities, the

continues on page 2

“Community Conversations” Bridge the Gap Between People with Developmental Disabilities and Key Decision Makers *continued from cover*

help shape the ways in which people with disabilities are included in New Jersey’s communities and portrayed in the media. The main objective is to better familiarize the public with people with developmental disabilities and improve public perception.

“It is our hope that decision makers statewide will have a better understanding of people with developmental disabilities and will look for ways to include them in daily discourse,” Lozano added. “By excluding this key population, New Jersey is losing many opportunities to expand local businesses, improve education for all students, gain valuable citizen input, and enhance the diversity of its communities. This outreach effort, we hope, will help to bridge those gaps.”



Council Member Myrta Rosa, below, addresses the group in Kendall Park.



Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver, D-34, far left, and Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker, D-28, listen as Linda LeCourse speaks with the group in West Caldwell.



State Budget Woes Worsen *continued from cover*

Governor and his advisors were trimming millions from the 2009 budget to close a widening \$1.2 billion gap. Corzine previously proposed cutting \$812 million from the budget in January and another \$472 million in February to make up for sharply declining revenues. The New Jersey State Constitution requires a balanced budget.

For the 2010 state fiscal year, the Governor has said he needs to trim \$2 billion from the \$29.8 billion budget he proposed in March. Although much of the

state’s disability-specific spending was spared, there are cutbacks in the form of co-pays and restrictions for community providers. Planned expansion of some disability programs was either limited, deferred, or put on hold.

Some advocates have called for a rebalancing of state spending for services and supports for people with developmental disabilities, urging lawmakers to redirect some of the resources spent on developmental centers to community services.

“Community Conversations” (Conversaciones con la comunidad) ayuda a estrechar las diferencias entre las personas con discapacidades de desarrollo y las personas encargadas de tomar decisiones clave

Durante toda la primavera, los legisladores locales y estatales se reunieron con los ciudadanos con discapacidades de desarrollo y los proveedores de las comunidades para conversar sobre las formas en que las comunidades de New Jersey pueden ser más inclusivas para todos sus miembros.

Estas sesiones únicas de “Conversaciones con la comunidad”, patrocinadas por el Consejo de New Jersey sobre discapacidades de desarrollo, se llevaron a cabo en cafeterías locales en donde facilitadores impulsaron un diálogo franco diseñado a romper con las barreras de comunicación y promover un mejor entendimiento entre las diversas poblaciones.

“Estamos dirigiendo un proceso que se inicia llegando a los líderes que son las personas locales encargadas de tomar decisiones en las comunidades de todo el estado y que influyen directamente en la política y sentir público”, dijo Alison Lozano, directora ejecutiva del Consejo de Discapacidades de Desarrollo de New Jersey (NJCDD). “Es necesario que comprendan los beneficios intrínsecos de incluir a las personas con discapacidades de desarrollo en las estructuras residenciales, económicas, educativas y sociales de nuestro estado”.

Se invitó a todos los legisladores estatales, titulares y alcaldes de New Jersey a participar en las conversaciones con la comunidad. La primera conversación se realizó en Caldwell el 23 de marzo; la segunda en Kendall Park el 20 de abril y la tercera en Audubon el 11 de mayo.

Las conversaciones con la comunidad son parte de un proyecto mayor diseñado para abordar los estereotipos negativos respecto a las personas con discapacidades y para ayudar a modelar formas para incluir a las personas con discapacidades en las comunidades de New Jersey. El principal objetivo es lograr que el público se familiarice más con las personas con discapacidades de desarrollo y se mejore la percepción pública.

“Esperamos que las personas encargadas de tomar decisiones en todos los estados comprendan mejor a las personas con discapacidades de desarrollo y busquen formas para incluirlas en la actividad diaria”, señala Lozano. “Al excluir a esta población clave, New Jersey está perdiendo muchas oportunidades de ampliar los negocios locales, mejorar la educación de todos los estudiantes, beneficiarse con las contribuciones de ciudadanos valiosos y fortalecer la diversidad de sus comunidades. Esperamos que este esfuerzo de extensión ayude a salvar esas diferencias”.

Regional Day Schools to Remain Open

In a turn-about in the FY 2010 budget process, Governor Corzine has rescinded plans to close 17 state-operated schools that serve students with disabilities, at-risk youths, pregnant teenagers and teenage parents. The closures would have saved the state an estimated \$4M

The Department of Children and Families (DCF), which runs the centers, announced the closures in early April as part of the budget process. According

to DCF Commissioner, Kimberly Ricketts, the decision was not based on cost savings, but rather on declining enrollments and the department’s desire to focus on its core mission of child protection.

The closure effort was strongly opposed by families of the 560 students who attend the schools and by roughly 400 full-time and 100 part-time state employees who work at the schools.

Community Calendar



- June 30** The Evaluation and Management of Seizures in Children and Adults with Developmental Disabilities, sponsored by UMDNJ. Live webinar from 12:00 noon – 1:15 p.m.; or 7:00 p.m. - 8:15 p.m. For more information, call 973-972-1660 , or e-mail ccoe@umdnj.edu.
- July 1, 8, 15, 22** Lunchtime Teleconference Series sponsored by SPAN. From 12:00 noon – 1:30 p.m. Topics and presenters vary. To register, call 973-642-8100 x 116, or e-mail trainings@spannj.org.
- July 9** 7th Annual Summer Inclusion Conference, sponsored by the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education, Ewing, NJ. For information, call 732-613-0400, or visit <http://njcie.net>.
- July 14** Preparing for the Future: What Grandparents and Extended Family Members Need to Know, featuring Paul Prior, Esq. Sponsored by Autism NJ. 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. in Cherry Hill, NJ. For information, call 1-800-4-AUTISM or visit www.autismnj.org.
- July 24** Public Meeting of the State Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Intervention, 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. in Lawrenceville. For information, call 609-730-1522, or e-mail tegoeke@verizon.net.
- July 30** Public Meeting of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities. 10:00 a.m. – 3 p.m. in Trenton. For information, call 609-292-2745 or visit www.njcdd.org.

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The Council is a compilation of news from various sources, organized to inform people with disabilities about policies, programs, laws, trainings, and events. This publication and others published by NJCDD are available in alternate accessible formats. Please call the Council for more information.

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