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**UNITE  
INSPIRE  
EDUCATE  
and  
ADVANCE  
MISSISSIPPI**

A Collaborative Publication from MS CDD, DRMS, and IDS



**THREE MISSISSIPPI DISABILITY AGENCIES  
RELEASE FIRST JOINT NEWSLETTER**

Welcome to the introductory issue of FUSE, a joint publication of the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MS CDD), Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS) and the Institute for Disability Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi (IDS). All three agencies are funded by the federal Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) to ensure that people with developmental disabilities receive services as required by the DD Act. In the spirit of coming together, these organizations proudly present this newsletter which will provide useful information in the hopes of sparking readers' imaginations, and perhaps even "lighting some fuses" that will lead to action and further collaboration. The goal is to feature news you can use -- newsworthy updates, stories, and information that will inspire and empower readers to promote a more inclusive and accessible Mississippi for ALL who live here. Please enjoy this first edition and acquaint yourself with the faces of the agencies.

**Safe and Inclusive Summer Fun for All**

For most of us, summer means travel, fun activities, and a break from the everyday grind of work or school. If you or a family member has a disability, summer can also create unique challenges. Families often turn to summer camps for activity and an opportunity to make new friends. Finding the right program can be complicated, but remember you don't have to limit yourself to camps specifically for people with disabilities. If you are looking for something to accommodate your needs or those of a family member, with a little searching you'll be surprised what events or camps you may discover. There are resources for finding just the right program, whether it's a camp that specializes in programs for specific disabilities or focuses on activities such as art, music, or sports. A great Web site for searching across the country is [www.mysummercamps.com](http://www.mysummercamps.com). If you want to stay closer to home, search community newspapers, chambers of commerce, volunteer centers, or disability agencies. Local television and radio stations, colleges or universities are other resources for locating summer activities. Some camps offer scholarships to cover the cost of attendance for families in financial need. If you don't qualify for financial assistance from the camp but can't afford the entire cost, there are other sources for help. Contact local churches or service organizations for assistance. No matter what you do, always remember, safety first!

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## Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MS CDD) Addresses Quality of Life Issues

The MS CDD is a 30-member state board appointed by the governor. At least 60 percent of its members are individuals with developmental disabilities or family members. The Council also includes government representatives from public and private support/service organizations. The MS CDD promotes quality of life issues for individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, and the community at large through demonstration projects, grants, and initiatives that have the potential for replication. The Council's Five Year State Plan begins with an overall premise that services and supports generally available to all people of Mississippi must also be available to its citizens with disabilities. Areas of emphasis include employment, transportation, housing, quality assurance, formal & informal community supports, education & early intervention, recreation, childcare, and health. Increasing the role of advocacy, providing the public with information, and expanding the opportunity for real choice are all key elements leading to further change in Mississippi. MS CDD believes that people with disabilities are as unique as their fingerprints. Often individuals become more limited by the lack of services/supports available in a variety of settings than any real obstacles caused by their perceived disabilities. Too many times the focus becomes the disability and not the ability of a person to work, live, love, and fully experience life in their communities. As noted by self-advocate Randy Graise in 2006, "People see you and automatically characterize you in a certain way and then form an unfair expectation of your actions and your abilities." MS CDD is committed to keeping the focus upon limitless possibilities for all.



## **SELF-ADVOCACY: ONE OF LIFE'S KEYS TO SUCCESS**

*By Nickey Kirkwood, Arc of Mississippi's Project Director for My Voice My Choice and Mississippi's Self-Advocates Striving for Leadership Empowerment Initiative*

The best type of advocacy is self-advocacy. Self-advocacy plays a part in all of our lives whether we have a disability or not. It starts from the womb and continues throughout our lifetime. We start by saying when we are ready to enter this world on up until we say goodbye to it. Self-advocacy is speaking for YOU; telling what you want, need, and dream of. It can be used to advocate for employment opportunities, housing options, and better public transportation;

basically whatever your heart desires to go for. Being a self-advocate is the best choice one can make, because it gives you a little more power, courage, and confidence to have your voice heard. The stronger and more active the self-advocate you are, the better you will be in today's society. Think about all of the great leaders we encountered over the years and presently. All of these individuals started out having other people (parents, grandparents, etc.) advocate for them

until they realized they had a voice and choices. Those people who advocated for them taught them self-advocacy over the years and helped give them the wings to fly and become the leaders we know them as today. So always keep in mind that self-advocacy, along with self-determination, are the best skills to have throughout one's life, whether you are a person with a disability or not.





## DISABILITY RIGHTS MISSISSIPPI

Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities

### Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS) - Advocating for the Legal Rights of People with Disabilities

In June 2009, Mississippi Protection and Advocacy System changed its name to Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS) and took on many new projects. DRMS provides individual representation and systemic advocacy to address issues facing people with disabilities in facilities, the community, and in education.

The mission of DRMS is to protect, promote, and advocate for the legal and human rights of all people with disabilities, and to assist them with full inclusion in home, community, education, and employment. DRMS does not provide direct supports or services to people with disabilities; rather, it helps by asserting their legal rights to have such services provided in a safe and appropriate manner.

DRMS represents individuals with disabilities in issues involving special education; Medicaid benefits; physical or programmatic accessibility; housing or employment discrimination based upon disability; social security overpayments; representative payee abuse and return to work planning; assistive technology; and voting rights. It also monitors conditions within facilities and investigates allegations of abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation. DRMS also provides information and referral on issues for which it cannot provide direct representation, and training on legal rights and self-advocacy.

Recent successes include 1) a negotiated settlement with the City of Jackson which resolved many of the issues regarding accessible public transportation raised in a class action suit filed by DRMS and joined by the Department of Justice; 2) a report on abuse, neglect and exploitation in personal care homes which received national recognition and led to improvements in state monitoring and investigations; and 3) persuading the Office of Civil Rights to investigate a complaint about a school district whose buildings were not physically accessible.

DRMS is currently working on a major report on the disparity of the quality and costs of services provided by the state and the Medicaid program to individuals with disabilities within facilities and in the community.



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At a recent national conference for Protection and Advocacy system staff, DRMS PAIMI Advisory Council Chair Charlene Gressett accepted an award recognizing DRMS' report which exposed problems within Mississippi's personal care home system.

### New Commissioner for the Administration on Developmental Disabilities Appointed



Earlier this year it was announced by the Department of Health and Human Services that Sharon Lewis, a well respected public policy advocate in Washington, had been appointed as the new Commissioner for the Administration on Developmental Disabilities at the Administration for Children and Families. Ms. Lewis is noted for her extensive experience as a disability policy advocate and her work as the lead staffer on disability provisions of key pieces of legislation as she served as Senior Disability Policy Advisor to U.S. House Committee on Education & Labor Chairman George Miller. Her work on Capitol Hill as an expert on family support, post-secondary education, and leadership training for families and self-advocates has perhaps been most significantly influenced by her hands-on experience as a parent of a young person with developmental disabilities. We all join in welcoming her with many wishes for a dynamic future.

## Institute for Disability Studies at the University of Southern Mississippi (IDS) - Focus on People



These youth leaders are members of the Youth and Emerging Leaders Advisory Council developed for the TRIAD project which assists youth transitioning from school to adult life.

Headquartered for over 30 years on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi, IDS has worked to provide technical assistance, training, resources and supports for Mississippians with disabilities and their families. IDS' programs, most statewide, reflect the current needs of individuals with disabilities. Areas of emphasis are housing, health, early childhood intervention and education, emergency preparedness and recovery, and assistive technology. IDS serves people of all ages, from newborns to seniors.

“At IDS, we believe all individuals are valued, and everyone should be included in their community,” said Royal Walker, Jr., J.D., Executive Director. “We believe families are the best providers of support, care and love, and services to individuals with disabilities should be person-centered, coordinated, culturally competent and family friendly.”

IDS' core functions include preservice training for students and professionals, community training and technical assistance, direct service, community service, research and education, and information dissemination. Part of a national network of 67 federally funded University Centers on Disabilities advancing policy and practice for and with individuals with developmental and other disabilities, their families and communities, IDS has an office in Jackson, a technology learning center facility rebuilt on Southern Miss' Long Beach campus after Hurricane Katrina, and a Delta housing office in Indianola.



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THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI  
INSTITUTE FOR  
DISABILITY STUDIES

### IDS' Home of Your Own Program Opens Doors

HOYO has assisted over 370 people with disabilities and their families living in 50 counties in becoming homeowners since 1997. This award-winning program plays a valuable role in assisting individuals with disabilities in purchasing safe, affordable, accessible housing and living as independent members of their communities. Annually, HOYO educates over 300 individuals with and without disabilities on becoming homeowners in monthly homebuyer classes.



The hall and doorways of Mr. Truss' new home allow him to move easily throughout the house.



## IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

July 22 & 23, 2010 -

The ARC of MS Annual Conference in Natchez MS  
(800) 717-1180

July 24, 2010 -

ADA 20th Anniversary Celebrations, being held in  
Jackson & Biloxi MS (601) 969-4009 - LIFE office

August 6, 10 & 12, 2010 -

Disability Partners Community Forums in:

**Biloxi** - 8/06/10 at MSU Extension on Pops Ferry  
at 1:30pm (800) 772-4057

**Brandon** - 8/10/10 at Region 8 Mental Health on  
Marquette Rd at 2:30pm (800) 772-4057

**Oxford** - 8/12/10 at Oxford Conference Center on Perry  
Blvd. at 1:30pm (800) 772-4057

August 12, 2010 -

MS Statewide Independent Living Council Meeting in  
Jackson MS at 12:00pm (601) 650-7333

August 21, 2010 -

MS Parent Training & Information Gulf Coast Regional  
Conference: "Empowering Parents, Improving  
Outcomes" in Ocean Springs MS (800)-721-7255

August 25 & 26, 2010 -

Annual Rehabilitation Association of MS (RAM)  
Conference in Philadelphia MS (800)-443-1000

October 21, 2010 -

Veterans Resource Fair at Veterans Administration in  
Biloxi, MS (228) 206-8822— Disability Connections

October 23, 2010 -

Mayor's Disability Awareness Health Fair at Edgewater  
Mall in Biloxi, MS (228) 206-8822

October 30, 2010 -

LIFE of MS Annual "Bridging the Gap" Walk in  
Vicksburg MS (601) 969-4009

- Every month Project Start puts on multiple trainings pertaining to many types of assistive technology. Contact Dorothy Young at (800) 852-8328 for scheduling and events.
- Plan ahead for your child to attend camps such as Kamp Kaleidoscope, MS Families as Allies, Camp Dream Street, and Hope Hollow Ministries for summer 2011. They fill up very fast!
- Register to vote no later than October 2, 2010 to be eligible to vote in the general elections taking place this November. For more information call 1-800-772-4057 or contact the Secretary of State Election Hotline at 1-800-829-6786. Take part in your civic life!

## FUSE Partners Create Opportunities for Community Input in August

DRMS, IDS and MS CDD will jointly sponsor three public meetings in early August 2010 to gather information and viewpoints from the public about priorities and projects for the upcoming year. Following the model of DRMS' 2009 "Time to Share" Campaign, each event will provide an accessible, approachable and interactive forum for sharing information and discussing concerns. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about each agency and will be given ample opportunity to make suggestions about what they think are the priority needs facing people with disabilities in Mississippi. Locations will be accessible with sign language interpreters and transportation provided if requested in advance. Details about dates, times and places are in the calendar above. For more information, call DRMS, IDS, or MS CDD. Plan to attend, bring a friend or two, and be heard! Take advantage of this opportunity to have your voice echoed threefold. For those who cannot attend a live event, surveys will be available on line or can be mailed upon request.

**"Obstacles don't have to stop you! If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it or work around it." Michael Jordan**



## FUSE: News You Can Use

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This newsletter can  
be made available  
in alternate formats  
upon request

FUSE is a collaborative effort of the MS Council on Developmental Disabilities, Disability Rights Mississippi, and the Institute for Disability Studies.

### *Links and Helpful Resources*

[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add) - The Administration on Developmental Disabilities (ADD) is the U.S. Government organization responsible for implementation of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, known as the DD Act. ADD, its staff and programs, are part of the Administration for Children and Families, of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[www.dmh.state.ms.us](http://www.dmh.state.ms.us) - The MS Dept. of Mental Health.

[www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com) - Reliable information about special education law, education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities.

[www.tkmartin.msstate.edu](http://www.tkmartin.msstate.edu) - Center at Mississippi State University focusing on advanced assistive technology for individuals of any age with a disability.

[www.business-disability.com](http://www.business-disability.com) - The National Business and Disability Council.

[www.msprojectstart.org](http://www.msprojectstart.org) - Part of MS Dept of Rehab Services, focusing on assistive rehabilitative technology.

[www.ncil.org](http://www.ncil.org) - As a membership organization, NCIL advances independent living and the rights of people with disabilities through consumer-driven advocacy.



**We want to hear from you! If you found FUSE to be helpful and informative, but would rather receive it via email, please call us and make sure we have your email address (1-800-772-4057).**

**If you have suggestions for future topics to be featured in FUSE, please let us know! Call or email us. Together we can spark a new idea!**