



Speaking out for people with  
intellectual and developmental  
disabilities

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## VOR Weekly News Update

News and views for VOR advocates

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VOR is a national organization that advocates for high quality care and human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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#### **VOR and You**

#### **1. VOR Awareness Event: VOR to be part of the Germantown (MD) Oktoberfest**

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Back from a successful conference in Pennsylvania where she shared VOR's information with families and advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, Linda Lotzi, VOR Board Member, is once again planning to promote VOR Awareness and Membership at Oktoberfest in Germantown, MD.

On October 6, 2012, Linda will be on hand to share information and answer questions about VOR to thousands who will attend the [30th Anniversary of Germantown Oktoberfest](#).

"It's exciting to be an exhibitor for the Oktoberfest in my home town area. Only 100 exhibitors will be setting up and more than 5,000 attendees," remarked Linda. "This will be a fun way to promote VOR Awareness."

For both conferences, VOR staff worked with Linda, providing her with all the handouts she needed and a nice conference display. It was great team effort, with incredible VOR Awareness potential.

Are there fall events in your area where VOR can be promoted? Please contact Julie Huso at [jhuso@vor.net](mailto:jhuso@vor.net) or 605-370-4652, or visit [VOR's website](#) for more information.

#### **2. VOR's Cristy Dwyer and Linda Blumkin deliver Olmstead testimony at New York State Public Forum**

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New York State is developing its "Olmstead Implementation Plan." Three public forums are being held to solicit suggestions from seniors, individuals with disabilities, families, advocates and providers of services on ways to improve the delivery of services to people with disabilities in the most integrated settings.

VOR's New York State Coordinator, Cristy Dwyer, and VOR member Linda Blumkin, provided testimony on Friday, September 28, 2012, one of the three public forum opportunities.

"*Olmstead* requires consideration of personal choice, not just one choice. Forcing 'integrated community settings' on every disabled person is the wrong starting point for *Olmstead* implementation," stated Ms. Dwyer. "Instead, consistent with the decision, the *Olmstead* Implementation Plan should, with public input, determine how to meet its obligation to provide range of quality services to individuals with disabilities so that every individual can be served in the "most integrated setting appropriate to their needs," from small to large public and private settings."

"*Olmstead* recognizes that we need a spectrum of services to meet the diverse needs of the developmentally disabled," testified Ms. Blumkin.

"New York [is not, but should] develop smaller campus-based programs for people whose needs are greater than an isolated group home in the community can accommodate, perhaps with a few cottages on a common property, sharing facilities on the property like a day program (for people who realistically cannot handle daily trips from their residence to day hab or a job), nursing support, behavior management specialists and other services."

[Read Cristy Dwyer's complete testimony here.](#)

[Read Linda Blumkin's complete testimony here.](#)

**3. SUNY Empire State College's Cristy Dwyer '08, '10 Wins SUNY ACT Scholarship; Benefits VOR**

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### **SUNY (The State University of New York) Press Release \* September 26, 2012**

*VOR Editor's Note: VOR offers our congratulations and gratitude to Cristy Dwyer. She and her husband, Hugo, serve as VOR's New York State Coordinators. Cristy also serves on VOR's Legislative Committee. Her award – the Association of Council Members and Trustees of the University (ACT) Award for Excellence and Student Initiative Scholarship – is so deserved. We're certain that Cristy brings the same level of commitment and heart to her academic endeavors as she does to VOR's advocacy. The scholarship award allowed Cristy to designate a charity to receive \$250 and she selected VOR. Thank you, Cristy!*

(SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y) SUNY Empire State College School for Graduate Studies student Cristy Dwyer '08 '10 has received the Association of

Council Members and Trustees of the State University of New York annual Award for Excellence and Student Initiative Scholarship.

"This scholarship recognizes your outstanding academic performance and extraordinary commitment to your campus and community. Your enrollment at Empire State College, attaining an associate and bachelor's degree while working for the Alcoholism Council of New York coupled with your dedication to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities were inspiring to our selection committee."

Pierre Alric, president of ACT.

The \$1,250 scholarship provides the recipient with a \$1,000 award and \$250 toward a donation to the charity of the recipient's choice.

Dwyer will be honored by ACT at an upcoming event being held Oct. 13, 2012.

"Cristy Dwyer's determination and compassion, as demonstrated by her work with the most disadvantaged citizens among us, are truly remarkable," said SUNY Empire State Acting President Meg Benke. "She is also about to earn her third degree from the college, a Master of Arts in Social Policy, and I am proud to count her among our many outstanding alumni. I am grateful to ACT for their recognition of Cristy's contributions to society and her academic achievements."

"For me, the academic experience at SUNY has been transformational. My now five year association with Empire State College has not only afforded the opportunity to realize my long-time goal of pursuing a college education, but has allowed me to pursue advocacy efforts and engage in a discourse with leaders on a local, state and national level," said Dwyer. "Without question, the policy courses I have received at SUNY have given me the knowledge, self-assurance and confidence to feel worthy of a seat at the table. Last but not least, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the extraordinary support I've received from the faculty at ESC. Without their continuous enthusiasm and encouragement I would not be where I am today."

"I met Cristy when she took my graduate courses Quantitative Methodology and Public Policy Analysis. She is unquestionably an exceptional master's student. and the best one I have personally taught so

far,” said Professor Roxana Toma of the college’s School for Graduate Studies and Dwyer’s faculty advisor.

“Naturally, when the time came, I happily agreed to be her advisor on her master's thesis. I was eager to nominate Cristy for the ACT award, and even more so when I was asked to write a recommendation letter to support her application. I am gratified by the fact that Cristy's work has been recognized in so many ways at the college level and above, and I couldn't be more proud! The ACT award makes all the difference in terms of a student's sense of accomplishment, and raises the profile of all our students and of us. I will continue to do my best as an advocate and supporter for all my students, working with them to get them these kinds of public recognition, because awards like this are elevating us all at ESC.”

\* \* \*

Dwyer also is an advocacy volunteer on behalf of intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals, serving as New York state coordinator for VOR, a national grassroots organization dedicated to ensuring the civil rights of individuals with profound and severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. She has appeared before the state legislature to deliver testimony during its recent investigations of a widespread pattern of abuse and neglect as reported by The New York Times series “Abused and Used.” She assisted in garnering bipartisan sponsorship of H.R. 2032, a bill authored by Rep. Barney Frank and Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz, designed to ensure that parents and guardians of profoundly and severely disabled individuals remain informed and, if they choose, are given the right to opt out of federally funded class action lawsuits that will determine where their loved ones will reside.

[Read Complete Press Release](#)

[More about Cristy Dwyer](#)

#### **4. On VOR’s website: Comprehensive checklist when considering community placement**

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VOR supports individual and family choice. For some individuals, an ICF/MR setting best serves a person’s specialized and intense needs. For others, a community setting is desired and more appropriate. Individuals and families who are considering a

transition to community placement must be educated about all community-based options. Any transition should occur only with the approval of the family or guardian and only after a period of intense scrutiny of available community options.

Families and guardians have many things to consider when evaluating competing choices. Every person viewing a program sees different areas of importance and priority that determine whether that program and provider are acceptable or unacceptable. It is a very personal choice.

To aid in that process, VOR offers a "[Community Check List](#)" that contains many questions to ask of potential providers, and things to look for.

Credits: Special thanks go to Polly Spare, VOR's Past President, who first developed a Community Check List. PROOF (the Parent-Relative Organization for Oakwood Facilities), a VOR affiliate in Kentucky, with the help of Anne Montgomery and the Council on Mental Retardation (Section 6), provided updates to Polly's original work.

**5. Reminders:** [Celebrating Home](#), [Growing VOR Membership Challenge](#), and [Legacy Giving Inclusive ICFs/MR](#)

**6. Florida: Gators plunge into their community; University of Florida students help Tachachale residents have fun – Wayne's smile wins the day**

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***Independent Florida Alligator* \* September 17, 2012**

*Editor's Note: The "Wayne" referenced in this article is the son of Don and Ruth Stover, longtime VOR members. Wayne is also featured with his winning smile on VOR's home page banner. He's the fellow in a baseball cap smiling large while taking a nice boat ride.*

The atmosphere on the Plaza of the Americas on Saturday morning was tense with anticipation. Nathalia Leal, a 21-year-old psychology and criminology senior, paced excitedly as she prepared herself to take a plunge.

She and more than 300 other UF students registered to volunteer around Gainesville as part of the Center for Leadership and Service's 13th annual Gator Plunge.

Gator Plunge allows UF students to get involved in their adopted community – a nonprofit organization or service agency - event coordinator Maria Muñoz said.

For Leal, that meant joining 14 other students in helping residents of Tacachale, a developmental disability center, play putt-putt golf, serving ice cream and giving out cotton candy.

As soon as the first resident, Wayne, came up to her station, she knew it was going to be a good day. Wayne, one of Tacachale's biggest jokesters, started laughing, jumping around and teasing staff members. Tacachale volunteer coordinator Rosa B. Williams said residents always enjoy groups coming to visit. She said it's an educational experience for both the volunteers and residents.

"They see new people, and all the attention is on them," said Center Administrator Michael S. Mayfield. "They really enjoy that interaction."

Mayfield said help from UF students is great because they can help future generations understand there is a place for the developmentally disabled population in society.

The overall experience was rewarding, Leal said. She said it only took a few hours, and she learned a lot about locals she wouldn't normally have met.

"Not only do you impact your community, but your community impacts you," Leal said.

### **7. Tennessee: Community Health Developmental Center provides many needed services**

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***The Times Volunteer (Campbell County, TN) \*  
September 21, 2012***

The [Community Health Developmental Center](#) provides a family, home, training, job opportunities and recreational activities for special residents of Campbell County.

"Our mission is to empower individuals and families to improve their quality of life," said Center Chief Operating Officer Missy Tackett. "Enrollment requirements for the center are that a person be at least 22 years of age, have an IQ score of 69 or below and have a primary diagnosis of mental retardation."

[Read More](#)

### **State News**

### **8. California's Preparation for Treating Adults With Autism in Question**

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***California Health Line \* September 24, 2012***

Health care advocates are concerned that California

might not be adequately prepared to care for the state's population of young adults with autism, the [Ventura County Star](#) reports.

About 60,000 residents currently receive state-funded services for developmental disabilities, a significant increase from the fewer than 5,000 residents who received such services in the mid-1990s. A large percentage of such residents are people younger than 22, the age when they no longer qualify for special education services in public schools. In the next three years, thousands of young adults with autism in California will reach that age threshold.

[Read more](#)

**9. Washington State: Homeless shelter to the "rescue" again: High-cost home puts mentally ill client in shelter**

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***The Seattle Times* \* September 26, 2012**

While charging his parents thousands of dollars for services and care, Normandy Park treatment provider Hanbleceya left Justin DeVille at a Pioneer Square homeless shelter because he hadn't followed the strict rules at a group home.

[Read More](#)

**Related Article:** [Cash-Strapped Ind. Parents Told To Drop Disabled Kids At Shelters](#)

**10. Texas: Turning State Hospital over to private firm is bad medicine**

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***The Houston Chronicle* \* September 7, 2012 \*  
Editorial by Maria Ramos**

*About the author: Ramos is a clinical social worker in private practice in Houston and a member of the ACLU of Texas board of directors.*

A coalition of civil rights, mental health, labor, public policy and faith-based organizations recently sent a letter urging DSHS [Texas Department of State Health Services] to reject GEO Care's proposal to manage one of the hospitals, which provide care to the indigent mentally ill and patients deemed incompetent to stand trial.

GEO Care's bid raises the obvious question. If this is such a lucrative offering, why is GEO Care, a subsidiary of the private prison corporation GEO Group, the only bidder for the job? Maybe because public mental health isn't - and shouldn't be - a profit-

making deal. Without taking risky shortcuts, it's difficult to see how GEO Care will turn a profit. GEO's track record in Montgomery County is a cautionary tale. Sixteen months after the Montgomery County Mental Health Treatment Facility opened in Conroe, the state's first publicly funded and privately run psychiatric hospital faces \$53,000 in state fines for serious problems with patient care.

[Read more](#)

## **Special Education Resources**

### **11. Roadmap to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)**

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#### ***WrightsLaw* Newsletter \* September 25, 2012**

Do you know what IDEA really says about IEPs?

- Who may be excused from IEP meetings?
- Can I change my child's IEP without a meeting?
- What are the IEP requirements for transition?
- What happens to services when we transfer schools?
- What does the law say about developing, reviewing and revising IEPs?

In [this issue of the Special Ed Advocate](#) you will learn about the legal requirements of IEPs. Get answers to your questions and find out what you need to know about IEPs, IEP teams, and IEP meetings. Learn how to use tactics and strategies to get quality services in your child's IEP.

See also, [Special Education Resources](#) on VOR's website.

#### **Quotable**

*"[I]f everyone is forced to accept community living, then no one has choice." ~ East Central Georgia Regional Center Family [Resolution](#) Opposing Settlement Agreement Between Georgia and the U.S. Department of Georgia (November 30, 2010)*

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