



DBTAC: SOUTHEAST ADA CENTER

A Project of the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University

Celebrating Our Achievements: Making a Difference

The DBTAC: Southeast ADA Center (Southeast DBTAC) and our State and Local Affiliate Network have, slowly but surely, been making a difference in people’s lives over the past 19 years. We have worked in our communities to promote voluntary compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Many “big things” have occurred through the years with the ADA that have received a lot of media attention. This past year we have seen the passage of the ADA Amendments Act.

However, it is those hundreds of little steps toward achieving access and nondiscrimination on the basis of disability that we think are the “truly big” story. All across America individuals, with and without disabilities, have been making differences in people’s lives. It is these foot/wheelchair/scooter soldiers who are the real heroes in our fight for equal access, equal opportunity and equal participation in our communities.

Congratulations to our colleagues, friends and associates who make up the powerful Southeast DBTAC ADA Network and have improved the lives of people with disabilities by promoting voluntary compliance.

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Access to Voting

Voting is a constitutional right for all citizens, yet people with disabilities frequently encounter barriers when they arrive at their local polling place. Recognizing the need for citizens to have full access to voting, on October 29, 2002, President Bush signed

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the "Help America Vote Act of 2002," (HAVA) into law. HAVA requires that there be at least one accessible voting machine – usually a computer with a touch screen – in every polling place by December 1, 2007. The December 2007 deadline has come and gone, and compliance has been less than impressive. Given last fall's Presidential Elections, assuring access to voting by people with disabilities was a primary focus throughout the Southeast Region. Members of the Southeast DBTAC Affiliate Leadership Council have been involved in accessible voting activities in their respective states. Below are some of the highlights that have produced real results.

Georgia: Getting In from the Get-Go

The Southeast DBTAC Georgia State Affiliate, Disability Resource Group, a non-profit organization led by Nancy Duncan, traveled across Georgia with other state elections officials to conduct training for poll workers from all 159 counties on "Serving Voters with Disabilities." With input from members of an advisory team, educational television produced a video on accommodating voters with disabilities, which was distributed and shown to all poll workers. Advocates also facilitated voter forums focusing on disability issues and the candidates' stand on these issues. The Disability Resource Group also prepared a pamphlet for people with reading or visual impairments. Perhaps the most significant change was the inclusion of people with disabilities in several precincts as poll workers. All of the pamphlets and videos cannot equal asking a fellow poll worker with personal experience for help in accommodating a voter with a disability.

Mississippi: It's Not Only WHAT You Know, But It's Also WHO You Know That Gets Results

At the Annual Conference of Southeast DBTAC Mississippi State Affiliate, LIFE of Mississippi, the focus of the first day was access, particularly voting access. Christine Woodell, a Southeast DBTAC TA Team member, presented a session on the importance of voting and what to do if you arrive at your voting place and find it inaccessible. The luncheon's keynote speaker was the new Secretary of State, Mr. Delbert Housemann, who talked about "Voting - It's Your Right and Responsibility." It is likely that Mr. Housemann would have accepted the invitation to speak anyway, but, as LIFE's Director, Christy Dunaway notes, "Delbert lives across the street from my Mom, and I have known him for 20 years, so I'm comfortable in saying that we will have a very good working relationship with his office to address any accessibility issues related to voting."

Among the issues Mr. Housemann was asked to address were developing plans to ensure accessible voting in Mississippi and working with LIFE to train state poll workers on the new accessible voting machines. Every precinct has them now, but often the poll workers are not familiar with the equipment and don't know what their obligations are to assist voters with disabilities.

Read more about the Voting Accessibility in the Southeast DBTAC's ADA Pipeline at www.sedbtac.org/ada/publications/newsletters/2008/17208P.doc.

Access to the Community and Transportation

AmeriCorps Members Trained To Do ADA Site Surveys

The Southeast DBTAC State Affiliate, LIFE of Mississippi, trained AmeriCorps members to conduct ADA site surveys in local communities, with a focus on those facilities that individuals with disabilities moving from nursing homes into the community were most likely to want to use. The training included an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and extensive information on the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. Members were also trained in how to use the ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal to conduct site surveys in local communities. The AmeriCorps members at each LIFE office had a site survey kit purchased with Southeast DBTAC funds and a standard survey form, developed by the LIFE AmeriCorps members.

Seventy initial site surveys and follow-ups were completed across the state (20 in South Mississippi, 21 in Central Mississippi, and 29 in North Mississippi). Each AmeriCorps member completed 2-3 initial site surveys, provided recommendations to the appropriate person, and conducted follow-up surveys to determine if access had increased. Initial site surveys were completed by the end of January 2008, and the follow-up surveys were completed by the end of April 2008. The surveys primarily focused on the accessibility of parking, entries, and restrooms, and the sites surveyed were: 12 Convenience Stores/Gas Stations, 9 Restaurants, 2 Grocery Stores, 3 Pharmacies, 7 Discount and Retail Chain Stores, 3 Hotels, 2 Tax Preparation Service Offices, 1 Shopping Center, and 11 Other Commercial Facilities, plus 2 Apartment Complexes, 2 Hospitals/Doctors' Offices, Educational Institutions (including a community college and a public high school), 3 Office Buildings, 1 County Office Building, and 1 State Government Office.

Read more about the Site Survey Project in the Southeast DBTAC's ADA Pipeline at www.sedbtac.org/ada/publications/newsletters/2008/17208P.doc.

Struggling for Accessible Transit in Jackson, Mississippi

As is the case in many other cities, lack of accessible transportation has been a major source of complaint from people with disabilities living in the Jackson, Mississippi Metro Area. In May 2007, Living Independence for Everyone (LIFE) of Mississippi, the Southeast DBTAC State Affiliate, submitted a list of rider complaints, which had been documented over the previous two year period, to the City of Jackson concerning the lack of transit accessibility on both the JATLAN fixed route and paratransit systems. In addition, individuals with disabilities rode all of the bus routes over a two-month period, taking photographs of broken lifts, inaccessible bus stops, lack of curb cuts and other barriers to transportation access. These photographs and the accompanying report were also submitted to JATLAN and city officials. When no action was forthcoming

despite a public forum and several meetings with transit and city officials, LIFE organized a peaceful demonstration in front of City Hall that resulted in the creation of an ADA Coordinator position for the City of Jackson and re-activation of the JATRAN Advisory Committee that now includes consumer representation. Despite these various attempts to negotiate for transportation access and the resolution of consumers' complaints, no progress was made. Therefore, in 2008, a complaint was filed with the Department of Justice, and a class action lawsuit was filed on September 23, 2008 by approximately 11 individual advocates and two organizational advocates. The Department of Justice has been to Jackson and interviewed plaintiffs in the case. They are waiting to determine if the suit can be settled before making a final decision on their involvement. The plaintiffs are pragmatic regarding a settlement. They know a court case will use valuable resources of both plaintiffs and defendants. However, a settlement will be contingent upon an agreement by the city of third party oversight.

Recruiting Employees with Disabilities

South Carolina DVD Promotes Recruitment of Employees with Disabilities

The South Carolina Employment Security Commission (SCESC), the Southeast DBTAC's South Carolina State Affiliate, developed an educational DVD for employers to increase awareness of the ADA and promote the recruitment and hiring of individuals with disabilities. The DVD highlighted the success story of the Walgreen's Distribution Center located in Anderson, South Carolina. The video shows how Walgreen's worked in collaboration with the SCESC One Stop Career Centers, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the SC Developmental Disabilities and Special Needs office to recruit and train people with disabilities as equal co-workers with employees without disabilities in this fully integrated distribution center. The DVD also provides information about the partnerships and resources available to employers to assist them in successfully recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities. The SCESC and the SC Employer Council distributed the DVD to over 700 employers.

Read more about the Employer DVD in the Southeast DBTAC's ADA Pipeline at www.sedbtac.org/ada/publications/newsletters/2008/17208P.doc.