

Report to DD Council
Prepared by
Advocacy Center
April, 2008

This month, the AC bids goodbye to Candice Sirmon who spent two years at AC as an Equal Justice Works Fellow. During her tenure with the Advocacy Center, Candice has interviewed 36 individuals seeking assistance with transitioning from institutions. Of those 36, 10 individuals were able to retain Candice, who is an attorney, and, with her assistance, successfully made the transition into more appropriate, more integrated living environments. She has also assisted with numerous information and referrals regarding post-Katrina/Rita issues, researched mental health rights issues, and conducted outreach to the homeless population in conjunction with Unity for the Homeless of Greater New Orleans. A few of the laws Candice has used while assisting her clients include: FHA; ADA; Rehabilitation Act; IDEA, Social Security (Medicare, Medicaid), Civil Rights and Universal Design.

The Advocacy Center recently signed onto the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition's Statement of Principles. The statement, signed by advocacy organizations throughout the country, will be sent to all Congresspersons, urging them to follow four principles in approaching the Reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. The four principles are:

1. Keep children and youth out of the justice system: Whenever possible keep children and youth out of the justice system, addressing their needs and those of their families early and effectively.
2. Ensure equity and competence: Do everything possible to ensure equity and competence with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender and sexual orientation, in legal representation before the courts and throughout all system practices and policies.
3. Ensure responses appropriate to a young person's age and stage of development: Do everything possible to ensure that children and youth in the justice system are treated in an age-appropriate manner and provided with developmentally appropriate, evidenced-based services and supports. Ensure, when needed, that sanctions are appropriate to a youth's age and offense.
4. Strengthen the federal partnership with state and local governments: Strengthen the federal role in supporting state and local needs by providing sufficient resources and appropriations for jurisdictions to effectively implement the JJDP, to fully comply with its core requirements/protections and to ensure state and local adherence to high standards of performance.

The National Disabilities Rights Network (NDRN) annual conference will be held in New Orleans on June 3, 4 and 5. Many AC employees will be presenting workshops and seminars. Lynette Fontenot, Chair of the DD Council, will also participate on a panel discussion of self-advocates during the conference. After the close of the conference, the Advocacy Center is hosting a “Volunteer Day” on Friday, June 6th, during which participants at the conference will volunteer their time rehabilitating the home of a family with disabilities. If anyone from Louisiana would also like to participate in the volunteer effort, contact Pamela Threton at the AC – 504-522-2337, ext. 125. We will need local people to help get volunteers from out of state to the work site.

The Advocacy Center will be operating its voting hotline during every election between now and the end of the year. We encourage anyone with questions or concerns about their ability to vote to call us at 1-800-960-7705.

AC , in conjunction with the Human Development Center, is hosting a series of housing workshops throughout 2008. We are focusing on the responsibilities of landlords to provide accessible rentals to people with disabilities. Check our website: lafairhousing.org for schedules and details.