

Report to Developmental Disabilities Council  
Prepared by Advocacy Center  
For October, 2008 Meeting

1. A number of Advocacy Center staff performed yeoman's work visiting emergency shelters to do outreach, offer assistance, and monitor conditions in the wake of **Hurricane Gustav**:

- One staff put in long hours in a Covington shelter and at Red Cross HQ, serving as a Spanish language translator, among other things. He gathered and circulated information in week following the storm.
- Another was in the thick of things in the shelters in Shreveport and Bossier, both before and after the storm. Some of these shelters were horribly crowded and lacked decent sanitation. The AC staffer was able to connect with people with disabilities in these shelters, bring their needs to the attention of shelter workers, and make sure that they were as well taken care of as possible.
- Yet another in the Shreveport area volunteered at the 211 office in Shreveport, providing referral information to people seeking help from around the state.
- Five N.O. staff and three from our B.R. office visited shelters from Denham Springs to Houma and everywhere in between. They were able to assist individuals to connect with needed services and to advocate with the Red Cross and FEMA to keep shelters open longer while the needs of residents with disabilities were addressed.
- While all that was going on, our Director of Systems Advocacy wrote a demand letter to the Secretary of DSS about the conditions at the food stamps offices. Long lines of people waiting in the sun was a direct violation of Food Stamp regulations that say that accommodations must be made for people with disabilities and senior citizens.

2. We are very excited about Advocacy Center's DD Council-funded **Disaboom and Facebook project**. The goal of this project is to increase involvement of Louisianians with disabilities in social networking sites, blogs, wikis and the Internet. We hope to use this involvement to increase community organization and gain a greater understanding of issues important to these individuals.

With \$5,000 funding from the DDC, we were able to recruit people to regularly post information, and opinions on these sits. We had originally proposed to recruit and pay 15 people; but it was too hard to eliminate the many good applications we

received. So, we are currently giving a stipend of \$45 a month to 16 people from Shreveport to Lake Charles; from Baton Rouge to Slidell and everywhere in between. Our bloggers cover the range of disabilities: deaf, blind, spinal cord injury; cerebral palsy; depression; learning disabilities; mental retardation, etc.

We hope to see the number of people logging on to Disaboom and Facebook grow in the months and years to come, and to eventually become a strong voice for adults with disabilities in Louisiana.

3. AC is happy to report the receipt of a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice. The funds will permit us to provide training to people with disabilities about issues of violence against women. The first year of the grant must be devoted to planning, with years two and three being devoted to direct services.