



2014 ANNUAL REPORT



Disability Rights
FLORIDA

Maryellen McDonald and Ann Robinson presenting Dawn Williams with an engraved vase to commemorate her 20 years of service to Disability Rights Florida.



Beth Piecora and seven other members of our Board of Directors, along with staff members, at the Florida Capitol.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

CARMEN RAMOS



DRIVEN, PROLIFIC, AND RELENTLESSLY INSPIRED, Carmen Ramos has to create art. She uses the heel and fingers of her right hand to create paintings such as *Stormy Weather*, the painting featured throughout this report. Ms. Ramos paints with acrylics, creating ethereal forms and meticulously layered colors. Her abstract expressions are captivating and ever expanding in their complexity and variety. Ms. Ramos' visual arts repertoire extends beyond painting. She is compelled to explore all the possible media and techniques available to her. She continually pushes boundaries by insisting that it is possible and by asking her support system to help her express herself. Together they develop the adaptive tools and methods that allow her to achieve her visions. Ms. Ramos has exhibited widely throughout the state of Florida.

ANNUAL MESSAGE

Our annual report provides an opportunity to reflect upon the past year and the pages which follow highlight a few of our accomplishments. Our priorities guide our focus throughout the year. For example, we continue to collaborate with Florida's Developmental Disabilities Council and other stakeholders in order to reduce the number of individuals on the waitlist for Home and Community-Based Services and further the goal of community integration. In preparation for the 2014 election, we introduced a new brochure with voting information in English, Spanish and Creole for individuals with disabilities. Also, our priority to increase services, information and referrals was successful due to our active outreach efforts. We received a record number of 7500 calls during 2014.

At Disability Rights Florida, our federal mandate is to prevent abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities in institutional settings whether they are in treatment facilities, county jails or state prisons. Newspaper reports last year focused attention on state correctional institutions following the death of an inmate with mental illness in South Florida. Disability Rights Florida collaborated with attorneys from the Florida Institutional Legal Services Project of Florida Legal Services to assess the conditions of inmates with mental illnesses in Florida's prisons. Although litigation is a last resort, it is one of many tools available to the protection and advocacy system.

Disability Rights Florida encourages input from Floridians as we establish our goals and priorities. There is still much work to be done to accomplish our priority of fully inclusive communities. Due to fiscal accountability, we have weathered the ups and downs of the economy and as we look to the future, we feel confident in our ability to protect the rights of Floridians with disabilities and to ensure full participation by increasing opportunities in housing, transportation, employment and education.



Beth Picora

Chair, Board of Directors

Maryellen McDonald

Executive Director

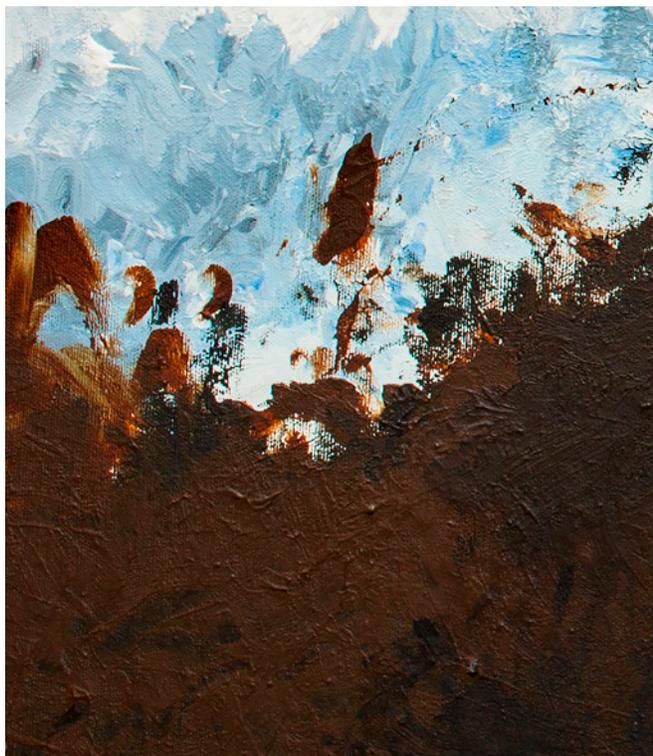
CRISTIAN'S STORY



CRISTIAN'S ENTIRE FAMILY - MOTHER, FATHER, AND SIBLINGS -

attended the highly rated Nova Blanche Forman Elementary school. It was a family tradition. Cristian is a student there too. Because he has Type I diabetes, Cristian's doctor said he needed to be able to get home from school each day in under 45 minutes. In 3rd grade, Cristian's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Section 504 plan both included his needs and appropriate transportation was provided.

In 4th grade, Cristian's IEP and 504 plans outlined the same transportation need, but that year, the school district put him on a bus that took 90 minutes to return home each day after school. When the family complained, the school district refused to accommodate Cristian's IEP and offered Cristian the opportunity to move to a lower performing school closer to home instead. Cristian's mother called Disability Rights Florida. Mom thought Cristian's case was simple and would be resolved within a few days. When it went on for months, she was pleased that "Disability Rights Florida never wavered from their commitment to fight for the rights of my child. My Disability Rights attorney made me completely comfortable through the entire process. She made herself available and answered all of my questions."



The case became more complicated because the district soon cancelled Cristian's transportation altogether. We immediately filed for a due process hearing to protect his rights. The case was resolved when an administrative hearing officer found that the district's unilateral termination of transportation was a deprivation of Cristian's education rights. The hearing officer also noted the district's failure to understand school choice law and effectively coordinate between special education and transportation.

We remained involved into the beginning of 5th grade due to concerns that the problem would recur. Luckily, mom recently reported that, "Cristian is now excelling in school and has a new found confidence in dealing with his daily health needs."

SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

IN 2014, WE DECIDED IT WAS TIME TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PRACTICE OF SHELTERED WORKSITES.

Sheltered workshops are programs that provide individuals with disabilities an opportunity to work or train for employment that are exempted from minimum wage requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Originating in 1938 as an incentive for manufacturers to hire veterans with disabilities, Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act is the law that continues to authorize sub-minimum wages. Florida has over 90 Section 14(c) employers.

Our membership organization, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN), worked with us to develop a monitoring tool specifically for Florida. NDRN staff then came down to our Tallahassee office to roll out the tool and train staff on the process. Following the training, our staff split up with the two staff members from NDRN to get a feel for using the protocol. They were able to conduct visits to two sites in northwest Florida. Disability Rights Florida staff then proceeded on our own to visit other sheltered workshop sites in various parts of the state. Overall, Disability Rights visited 27 of Florida's 90 programs. The employers we visited provided individuals either on-site work or a combination of on-site and off-site work. Most of the employers we visited paid subminimum wages for on-site work such as assembly, shredding, sorting, or packaging,

although a few were paying minimum wage. We did encounter one group of maintenance workers paid \$15 with benefits and vacation time.

We met individuals who were sorting nails or breaking down computers. We learned by interviewing them many would rather be doing something different. We also met individuals who said they wanted to be doing the same or similar work, but at real jobs out in the community. The most interesting work site we observed was where employees prepared items for resale on eBay. Employees photographed items and uploaded the photos. The items included glass for crafts that had been polished using a rock tumbler. For individuals working off-site, the work was usually janitorial, lawn maintenance, litter pick up, or recycling used clothing.

We found a few Section 14(c) employers providing truly innovative work experience as well as rich community integration. Unfortunately, many employers were failing to help their employees engage in activities that would demonstrate their true employment potential. We will be continuing our review process as well as collaborating with stakeholders and state agencies in the Employment First initiative to ensure competitive employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.



CHARLES POLK'S STORY



CHARLES POLK IS A RETIRED UNITED STATES AIR FORCE CAPTAIN.

For sixteen years, he worked for the US Postal Service in a job that made him responsible for nationwide strategic diversity planning and implementation. After Mr. Polk had a stroke, he was unable to return to the job he enjoyed. His retirement benefits were sufficient, but he missed the satisfaction that comes from working. Mr. Polk contacted Disability Rights Florida seeking assistance when he felt the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was putting up barriers to his achieving his goal of self-employment. "I couldn't be more pleased with the services I received from Disability Rights Florida. From start to finish, they made me feel like I was their only client and the level of passion, enthusiasm, and dedication they brought to achieving the best outcome in my interest was second to none." It took nearly a year of collaboration and advocacy, but the persistence of our partnership with Mr. Polk paid off. In 2015, Mr. Polk will officially launch his new consulting and training business called *Advanced Diversity Consulting* with the supports that he needed from Vocational Rehabilitation in place. Through the business, Mr. Polk plans to build another career for himself using his vast experience in work place diversity strategy and operations.

VOTER ACCESS AND REGISTRATION

DISABILITY RIGHTS FLORIDA ADDRESSED SEVERAL MAJOR VOTER ACCESS AND VOTER REGISTRATION ISSUES IN 2014.

We brought two years of advocacy to successful resolution in early 2014. Our concern was that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) was not consistently implementing the National Voter Registration Act's requirement that providers of state-funded services be Voter Registration Agencies. We learned that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health program was not offering voters registration opportunities to mental health and substance abuse service recipients through its contracted managing entities. Once DCF agreed with our analysis, we collaborated with the key stakeholders on implementation. During the last six months of 2014, providers forwarded over 2600 voter registration applications to local supervisors of elections for processing.

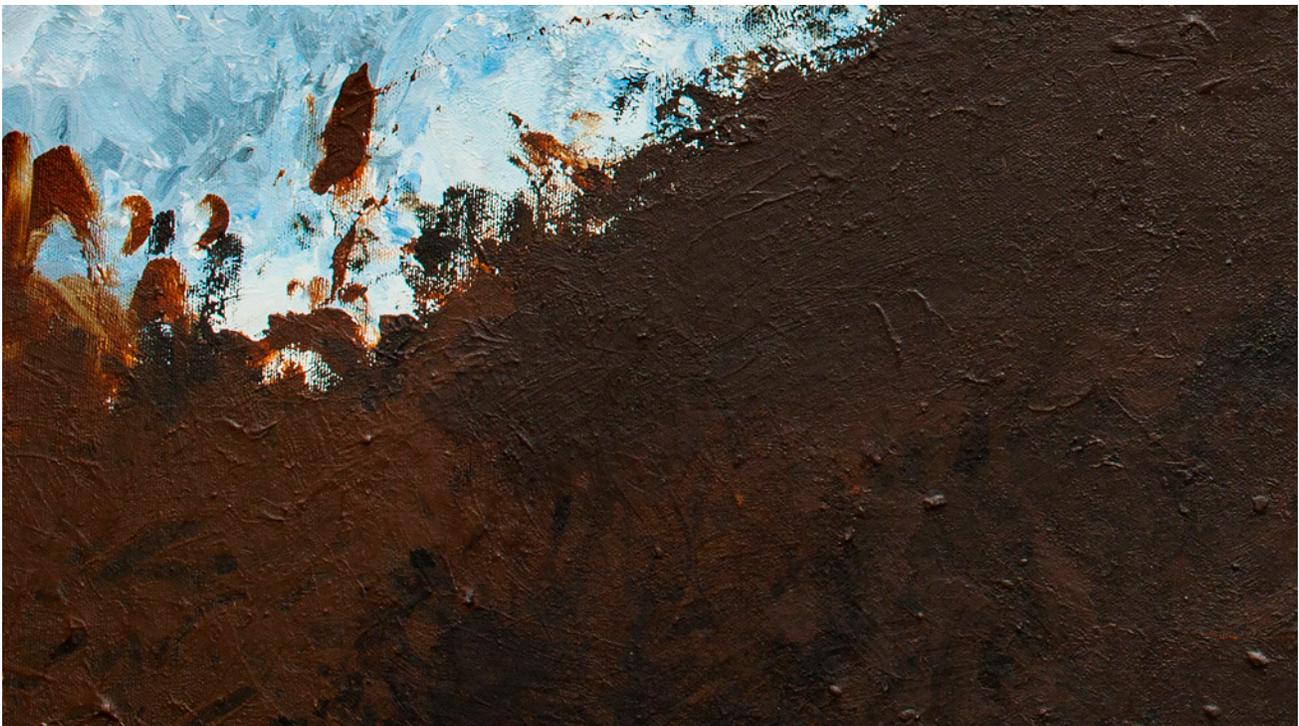
Throughout the year, we raised concerns about barriers to voters and accessible poll sites to the National Commission on Voting, Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections, and Florida Division of Elections. Then as the elections approached, we conducted outreach and provided educational materials to thousands of individuals and facilities. We assisted over 300,000 residents of facilities by providing information about registration and voter access to over 7000 administrators of hospitals, nursing homes, ALFs, and other facilities. When early voting began, Disability Rights Florida continued its historic practice of surveying the accessibility of early voting locations. Changes in Florida's 2013 elections law expanded the types of sites that could be used for early voting. We focused on these and visited 90 sites throughout the state. We found that over 85% of the items on the checklist were accessible. The most common accessibility problems we identified were associated with parking, paths of travel, and signage. These results will be shared with election officials.



LISA WIELGOSZ'S STORY



WHEN WE FIRST MET LISA WIELGOSZ, she was concerned about why her hours were being reduced at her job. Her local Center for Independent Living referred her to Disability Rights Florida. Ms. Wielgosz was working part-time at a job she loved - as a cashier, stocker, and produce handler, at her local grocery store. She has a life-long severe hearing loss and uses advanced lip reading skills to communicate, but to do that she has to watch a person's lips, not look into their eyes. She could quickly scan items but when she contacted us, she was worried that the company was expecting her to also make frequent eye contact with customers during her cashier shifts. With our support, Ms. Wielgosz successfully addressed this problem. She learned to use resources like the United States Department of Labor's Job Accommodation Network website and how to write a request for a reasonable accommodation at work. We guided her along the way, but it was her own self-advocacy that got her job duties adjusted and hours restored. Lisa summarized it this way: "Now I've been on my job for over 3 years. Disability Rights Florida gave me resources I needed to learn what I could do to approach my problem. With that information, I contacted my company with confidence. The problem got resolved and my managers have a better understanding of my disability. I would highly recommend Disability Rights Florida to others."



RESTRAINT DEATH INVESTIGATION

P.L. WAS A TEENAGER WHO DIED AT A PRIVATE FACILITY RECEIVING HCBS WAIVER DOLLARS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

We learned about this death as a result of the Casey Family Foundation report following its review of Florida's child protection system. After learning that P.L. had died while being restrained, our staff investigated. We found substandard evaluation and treatment by medical personnel, poor communication and documentation between direct care staff and nurses, a dangerous reliance on the use of restrictive behavioral intervention techniques and ineffective staff training all contributed to the death.

As a result of our investigation, we shared recommendations with facility administration and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) about reforms we determined were necessary to improve the facility's system of care and prevent further tragedies. APD had placed a moratorium on individuals being admitted to the facility and both APD and our organization continue to monitor implementation of the recommendations. The facility is working to correct deficiencies by improving documentation, systems of care and communication, as well as revising restraint procedures. We were very concerned that critical evidence of events leading to the death had been compromised. The video evidence that should have recorded most of the child's last night was destroyed so we are requesting the video monitoring be extended in these circumstances and should include an audio track. The facility is co-operating and is holding quarterly meetings with stakeholders to report on its progress.



JEFFREY & SUZANNE'S STORY



JEFFREY AND SUZANNE PLEDGER TRAVELLED TO FLORIDA TO EMBARK ON A CARIBBEAN CRUISE.

Joelle is Jeffrey's seeing-eye guide dog. When the Pledgers attempted to book ground transportation with a South Florida-based transportation company, they were repeatedly denied because of Joelle. Despite their patient attempts to explain to the company that it had a legal obligation to accommodate service animals under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the company was unwavering in its refusal. Eventually the Pledgers booked transportation with another company. What bothered them the most was that the company that had refused to accommodate Jeffrey would probably do the same thing to others in the future. To assist them with this concern, we initially urged the company to bring their practices into ADA compliance. When that was unsuccessful, we collaborated with Florida's Disability Independence Group (DIG) to bring a lawsuit in federal court. Together with the Pledgers and DIG, we then achieved an important systemic change for future customers of the company. The company agreed to adopt and distribute a new service animal accommodation policy and to train its current and future personnel. The company also agreed to post signs inside their vehicles and on their website welcoming persons with disabilities accompanied by service animals.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Assistive Technology — PAAT	\$132,169	2%	
Beneficiaries of Social Security — PABSS	\$324,519	6%	
Client Assistance Program — CAP	\$601,052	11%	
Developmental Disabilities — PADD	\$1,683,034	29%	
Individual Rights — PAIR	\$1,017,056	18%	
Individuals with Mental Illness — PAIMI	\$1,448,829	25%	
Traumatic Brain Injury - PATBI	\$48,677	1%	
Voting Access — PAVA	\$155,382	3%	
Other Grants, Donations, and Program Income	\$278,739	5%	
TOTAL REVENUES AND SUPPORT		\$5,689,457	

Program Services	\$5,063,317	90%
General and Administrative	\$568,250	10%
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$5,631,567



Disability Rights Florida is a non-profit organization funded by a variety of sources.
For a complete list of funders, go to www.disabilityrightsflorida.org/funders

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