

# Tools for Life Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2006

*Members Attending:* Perry Andrews (GA Dept. of Education); Adrienne Anderson (for Tiffany Johnston/Walton Options); Norris Curtis; Allan Goldman (Division of Aging Services); Stephanie King, Jerilyn Leverett (Disability Connections); Carolyn McGonagill (Tech-Able); Starla Steinmann (GA Dept. of Labor/Workforce Development); Beth Tumlin, Anne Warley, Joanne Willis (ReBoot-ATRC)

*Members Absent:* Thomas Bauer, Judy Bearden\*, Kenny Blanchard\*, Minna Hong, Lou Nations-Miller, Laura Overstreet, Curtis Rodgers, Gigi Taylor, Naomi Walker\*, John Weber\* (\*with notice)

*Staff Attending:* Joy Kniskern, Maya Mattison, Tom Patterson, Liz Persaud, Carolyn Phillips, Martha Rust

*Guests:* Lyne Hall

## Welcome and Meeting Introduction

The meeting began promptly at 10:00 am. Carolyn Phillips, TFL staff liaison with the Council, expressed regrets from Judy Bearden and Kenny Blanchard for not being able to attend. Carolyn also announced the resignation of John Weber from the Council after many years of service.

The Council also extended their best wishes to Naomi for a speedy recovery.

On a happy note, Carolyn Phillips informed the group about the impending additions to her family! Carolyn will be on leave for six to seven weeks. During that time she encouraged everyone to stay in touch via email.

## TFL State Plan Update

RESNA: The RESNA AT Reutilization Conference will be held at the new Georgia Tech Conference Center in Atlanta, from May 10-12, 2006. US Department of Education Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, John Hager, will be attending. A highlight of the meeting will be a site visit to FODAC and ReBoot-ATRC.

Martha Rust and Connie Freier from TFL will be attending the AT Online Exchange Meeting in Philadelphia at the end of the month.

AT Co-Op: Carolyn described the development of the AT Co-Op Concept Paper. Carolyn emphasized our goal of the Co-Op being a Win-Win-Win project. We hope the design is such that our clients *win* because the Co-Op offers easier acquisition of AT, vendors with whom we have established positive relationships *win* as the result of the “rising tide lifts all boats” phenomenon (more people able to afford AT will mean more business), and we will *win* as a program because the Co-Op helps us fulfill our mission of “increasing acquisition” of AT throughout the state.

There was extensive discussion on what particular model to select and what approach the Co-Op will take. Carolyn described Maryland’s AT:LAST project. In answer to a question about other models, Carolyn said that the Maryland Project was the longest term success. As the concept has developed, and with input from various stakeholders, the Co-Op will function more as a device-focus enterprise rather than one in which training is also offered separately. Carolyn made it clear that the project was still in

the design phase and would take into consideration all suggestions and concerns expressed by the Advisory Council and other interested parties. With that said, Carolyn is hoping for an August launch! Of course, we expect the project to grow from this initial start-up.

Beth Tumlin agreed that this project could certainly be a “win-win”.

Allan Goldman, Vice-Chair, asked about potential downsides to joining with Maryland’s Co-Op project (AT:LAST). Carolyn went on to describe how the project might work, noting that none of this has been agreed to as of yet. First of all, Maryland’s project would receive 1-3% of each sale which would cover administrative expenses. There would be a three-year contract and TFL would need to invest seed money to startup the project, especially for a reserve so that the Co-Op can pay vendors within a 30-day cycle. Obviously, such an undertaking will require careful consideration. Carolyn also assured the Council that the Georgia Co-Op will be able to use its own name and have its own identity.

Allan offered to contact the Georgia Healthcare Foundation at the appropriate phase of the Co-Op development. Joanne Willis also expressed interest in being the non-profit to administer the program.

Maya Mattison will provide a one-page summary of the Concept Paper. Jackie Wilks, Director of the Credit-Able program, will be looking into the [NCB Development Corporation](#), an affiliate of National Cooperative Bank (NCB) to see how the AT Co-Op might benefit from NCBDC’s programs.

Stephanie King expressed a key feature of the Co-Op when she noted how both individuals and agencies will both benefit from the lower costs associated with the Co-Ops “bulk” pricing. For example, lower pricing will enable more people to access affordable loans from Credit-Able.

Norris Curtis asked if just one piece of equipment could be purchased. Carolyn assured him that would be possible. An individual need not purchase in bulk in order to access the bulk purchasing power of the Co-Op. Purchasing a membership will also not be necessary in this type of cooperative.

Allan explained how the Georgia Department of Human Resources’ Division of Aging Services’ web portal might be a good way to spread word about the Co-Op. This “gateway” provides a single point of entry for aging and disability resources.

Advisory Council members also asked about alternatives to joining with the Maryland Co-Op, costs associated with “going it alone”, and what potential state laws may impact the AT Co-Op. In answer, Carolyn suggested that if we want to start the Co-Op in the near future, it would be necessary to work with Maryland. They have already developed the vendor relationships, pricing, and accounting systems to make the project work. Joy Kniskern assured the Council that the Co-Op would not be directly operated by Tool for Life (a state agency), but rather through the non-profit Touch the Future, Inc.’s ATRC program. This will alleviate some of the regulatory restrictions, as well as, meet the mission of the ATRC’s (Assistive Technology Resource Centers).

The Vice-Chair thanked the Council and staff for this worthwhile discussion but requested that the agenda be moved along.

**Conferences:** A joint Georgia Department of Labor Workforce Development Conference and TFL’s Touch the Future Conference will be held at the newly renovated Classic Center in Athens, GA from November 1 – 3, 2006. The theme will be “Unity through Diversity”, an idea we certainly embrace!

The Tools for Life staff expects this to be an exciting and positive experience. We envision next year's conference returning to the model TFL has used in its previous conferences. Incidentally, Carolyn reported that she has been told by other leaders in the disability field that Georgia's [Touch the Future Conferences](#) are nationally recognized and are considered to be among the best planned and executed AT conferences in the country.

Carolyn shared with Council members her meeting with the conference hotel and the Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau to review the [site location](#). She described how cooperative they were in addressing accessibility issues. She also noted that several new hotels are being built in Athens. There will be increased shuttle service for the Conference this year, including shuttles leaving from Macon, Atlanta, and other locations. This is intended to make the Conference even more accessible to disabled Georgians, friends, family, and allies.

**Town Hall Meeting:** TFL held its first Town Hall Meeting on January 31. The meeting was held in Rome, GA and was a great success. Carolyn acknowledged that this first meeting was in some ways a "test run" for the Town Hall Meetings to be held in the spring.

Attendance was excellent considering the limited advanced publicity. Approximately 30 people attended. The diverse group included concerned citizens, personnel from a wide spectrum of agencies, ATRC representatives, and disabled persons.

Carolyn thanked Mr. Curtis for representing the Advisory Council and thanked Ms. Steinmann for helping get the word out about the Meeting. Carolyn shared pictures of the meeting showing the high level of participation giving by those in attendance.

Suggestions were made to get information on the Town Hall Meetings out to local schools, to put the announcements on the TFL web site, and to send the dates out to Council members as soon as possible.. The dates for the upcoming meetings are:

April 12	Macon	May 24	Augusta
April 20	Albany	May 25	Savannah
May 2	Athens	June 16	Columbus
May 4	Atlanta	* Augusta & Savanna Dates are tentative	

**TFL Newsbriefs Schedule:** The Tools for Life *Newsbrief* (our periodic newsletter) has turned into a 20+ page *News*-not so-brief. The *Newsbrief* will continue to focus on one ATRC per issue while also including other ATRC highlights. It will be available online through the [TFL](#) web site (The current publication schedule is: the end of February, May, August, and November.

## AT Spotlight

Liz and Martha shared with the Council new Assistive Technology they learned about at the [Assistive Technology Industry Association](#) (ATIA) conference in Orlando in January. The [OrbiTouch](#) was passed around, the new version of [ZoomText](#) was discussed, and [Interpretype](#)® was demonstrated. Both Liz and Martha expressed how beneficial going to this conference was. They saw a new device from Norway called the [ROLLtalk](#). This device seems to do it all. (Anne and others expressed an interest in seeing a demonstration.) Carolyn was interviewed by [Exceptional Parent](#) magazine during a live webcast from the conference. Carolyn is also expecting Tools for Life to be included in an article written

for *Exceptional Parent's* April issue devoted to AT. (Beth Tumlin mentioned that she has a contact at *Exceptional Parent* should Carolyn need it.)

## Program Updates

**Marketing:** TFL is ordering two items to promote the program throughout the state. These items, a gripper and a pocket magnifier (it doesn't actually magnify pockets . . . but it is carried in pockets) are Assistive Technology in nature and will help keep the TFL name and mission in the public eye.

**TFL Annual Planning Meeting:** The TFL team met during the past quarter to plan and vision the coming year. The meeting was such a success that Carolyn is hoping that the ATRCs and TFL staff will be able to meet this year for a similar planning meeting. We could focus on program sustainability, revisiting ATRC business plans, and building teamwork and cooperation.

**TFL Calendar** Carolyn showed the Council the Calendar on the Tools for Life website and encouraged members to check in and see what the TFL staff was up to! Carolyn also informed the group about promotional items TFL was ordering in order to spread awareness of the program throughout the state.

**AT Funding:** Martha Rust reported on the status of AT funding activities. Dollars & Sense, a part of the TFL web presence, had received complimentary notice by Nell Bailey, Director of RESNA Technical Assistance Project. Martha also updated the group on funding changes in the Brain and Spinal Injury grant program. Raise caps for vehicle and home modifications to \$15,000 (will be able to reapply for trust fund after 2 yrs) and support services to \$10,000. Caps for computers were lowered to \$1,500. This does not include modifications that may be needed. Recreation caps were also lowered to \$3,000 per person every 6 years.

Liz Persaud explained the change in her working title from Information and Referral Specialist to Information and Assistance Specialist more accurately reflects her duties and the program's mission.

**AAC Project:** the Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) Tool Kit Project is a joint effort of TFL and ReBoot-ATRC. This project is intended to improve access and increase skill level of the service providers. The toolkit is designed to be an evaluation aid. The devices are not intended to be loaned out to individuals, but are instead meant to assist evaluators.

A nursing home toolkit for evaluating functional capability/AT Assessment for loan to Occupational Therapists. Also, individual consumers may borrow pieces of AT from their local ATRC. Perhaps even a "loan closet" for students/consumers could eventually be developed. This project grew out of a prior nursing home research concept developed by Carolyn McGonagill, Joanne Willis, and other agency representatives.

A suggestion was made to create an e-Trade database for school district AT inventory so that AT could be shared between schools.

## Credit-Able

Jackie Wilks was introduced as the new Credit-Able Director. The Tech-Able ATRC is now the "sole proprietor" for Credit-Able. Credit-Able is an exciting program and is saving participants thousands of dollars throughout the life of their loans.

## Assistive Technology Resource Center (ATRC) Updates

### Disability Connections

A special project begins this month in which 3 pilot episodes of a Disability Connection TV show will be produced for airing on local TV and cable TV. This project is made possible through a grant received from the Developmental Disabilities Council.

### ReBoot-ATRC

- 40 computers distributed this month
- 18 students from Stephens County Middle School received computers and training
- Partnership with Marietta Enrichment Center to create accessible computer lab
- Received grant to do software assessments w/ AT

### Tech-Able, Inc.

- Created accessible computer lab setup at 3 locations
- Providing monthly software lessons for teachers
- Working with High School/High Tech (HS/HT) on Microsoft Contest

### Walton Options

- 4 nursing home transitions in January and February
- 10 pending transitions
- Continuing independent living skills training every two weeks
- Planning for the TFL Town Hall meeting that will be held at Augusta Tech

ATRC Consortium Update: Jerilyn Leverette, Director of Disability Connections in Macon, spoke to the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Health and Human Services on February 1. While a larger request to fund ATRC expansion has been postponed, Jerilyn is still hopeful about obtaining an additional \$60,000 to distribute between the ATRCs, ReBoot, and Credit Able. Jerilyn distributed the hand out she prepared for the Sub-committee.

Jerilyn was pleased to announce that she had received positive feedback about the possibility of restoring the 2% state funding cut that has been expected. Ms. Leverette also noted that she has heard that the GA Dept. of Community Affairs has \$300,000 available in funding for homeowners among its many programs. Carolyn expressed hope that the impending 1% cut in Federal funding that is in the President's Budget will be softened by the addition of \$5 million to the Tech Act budget.

AgrAbility: Carolyn McGonagill advised the group that significant changes had been made in how provisions of the AgrAbility grant are handled. Carolyn, Joy Kniskern and others will be discussing these changes and how they affect the ATRCs.

## Upcoming Meeting Dates

**June 8** - Walton Options, Augusta (Directions) 11:00 – 3:00 (This is a one-time change.)

**August 24** @ Tech-Able, Conyers (Directions) 10:00 – 2:00

**November** – The Council will meet in conjunction with the GDOL/Touch the Future Conference in Athens. Date & Time TBA.

*Links to Agencies and Organizations mentioned in the Minutes:*

[Assistive Technology Industry Association](#)

[AT:LAST](#)

[Developmental Disabilities Council](#)

[Division of Aging Services](#)

[GA Dept. of Community Affairs](#)

[GA Dept. of Education](#)

[Georgia Department of Labor](#)

[HS/HT](#)

[National Cooperative Business Association](#)

[RESNA](#)

[Tool for Life](#)

*ATRCs*

[Disability Connections](#)

[ReBoot-ATRC](#)

[Tech-Able, Inc.](#)

[Walton Options](#)

*AT Devices*

[OrbiTouch](#)

[ZoomText](#)

[Interpretype](#)

[ROLLtalk](#)

*Businesses*

[Exceptional Parent](#)