

RI DISABILITY VOTE PROJECT

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Participate, Vote, Succeed

Disability Vote Action

The Newsletter of the RI Disability Vote Project

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Tallying the Disability Vote

The RI Disability Vote Project (RIDVP) continued in its efforts to mobilize members to get out the vote for the November 4 General Election, strengthening a nonpartisan and powerful voting bloc of people and organizations with disability interests from throughout the state. Members held phone banks in the days leading up to the election, often relying on the valuable data they received through list enhancement (see below) to target the calls. Project members and friends also helped verify the accessibility of all polling places by completing and submitting widely distributed polling place surveys from the Governor's Commission on Disabilities (GCD, one of the Vote Project's founding members and a major supporter). This group identified very few accessibility problems and none of the widespread malfunction of the AutoMark machines seen in the 2006 election cycle -- despite the record turnout at the polls.

RIDVP plans to measure the number of people associated with the Project who turned out to vote by obtaining results and data from the list enhancement process. List enhancement, a tool available to all members at no cost, does more than measure turnout. It also allows leaders to hone their fundraising efforts. Data show that frequent voters are more likely to volunteer, advocate for and -- perhaps most important in these turbulent economic times -- donate to an organization. List enhancement is the process of electronically adding information to an organization's database (which is coded for anonymity) by merging it with public data from the Rhode Island Secretary of State and the most recent U.S. census. The results help the disability community build a proven, powerful voting bloc. The more Vote Project members who participate in list enhancement, the more powerful we will become. The RI Disability Vote Project builds power through its members voting and letting our elected officials know how many people care about disability issues in Rhode Island.

Obama Inauguration Watch

Forty people with disability interests gathered at the Warwick Public Library's main branch on January 20 to watch Barack Obama' swearing-in as the nation's 44th President. The Rhode Island Disability Vote Project designed the event to let members gather together and participate in a moment of history. People with disability interests represent a growing voting bloc in Rhode Island, and this event strengthened that bond. Inaugural events in local communities around the country - from Portland, Oregon to Washington, DC to New York City - brought together people with disabilities to send a message to the new presidential administration that we have a voice. A network of national consumer-controlled disability organizations sent the Obama transition team a letter highlighting major changes needed in disability policy. According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, several people with disabilities already have joined the new administration in key positions.

At the Get-Out- the-Vote event held in October, RIDVP Steering Committee member and Providence Center Consumer Advocacy Council participant Charles Banks presented a touching speech called, "Why I am going to vote for the first time." He submitted the following message with the Vote Project early in the new year.

"I Am an Official Voter"

By Charles Banks

The year is now 2009. Everything in my life is going excellent, I think, at the age of 39. I think in order to succeed in life, you must be as good as possible. Voting is a way to capitalize on your success. The RI Disability Vote Project (RIDVP) believes everyone should be treated with respect, regardless of their disability or problem, and aims to have everyone participate in government by voting and advocacy.

Growing up I had a lot of friends. We were all Jehovah's Witnesses. As a Jehovah's Witness, we were taught to stay separate from the world and things like voting. As I matured and became wealthy with responsibilities, I learned that it was important to vote. The disability world wants to be heard, and we are part of society. The RIDVP's nonpartisan voter education builds power for people with disabilities through its developing voting bloc. In order to maximize the strength of Americans with disabilities, I decided it was time for me to vote. I admit it was a little scary as a first-time experience. But now that it is done, it feels great knowing that I had a part in the process of government decision-making, and the RI Disability Vote Project is happy that I am an official registered voter. I want to thank RIDVP for educating me about voting.

Upcoming Events

Save the Date! March 17, 2009

The RI Disability Vote Project will hold a **Legislative Advocacy Training** on Tuesday, March 17. Time and location to be determined. For more information please contact ridvp@ridvp.org or call (401) 295-5757 x15.

Save the Date! March 12, 2009

Partnerships: Journey to Independence for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs and their Families. Help us improve the journey to independence for children, youth, and families in Rhode Island. The Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) and our Family Voices program are proud to host our 5th Annual Partnerships Conference on March 12, 2009 to be held at the Providence Marriott Downtown, Providence, RI.

Save the Date! March 23, 2009

Advocates in Action will hold a statewide meeting from 7 – 9:30 pm on March 23 for everyone involved in the organization. For more information please contact debkney@advocatesinaction.org or call (401) 785-2028.

Training Opportunities: The Rhode Island Disability Law Center is available to provide trainings on voting rights, including the right to assistance, voter eligibility and a variety of other topics. Trainings can be designed for the needs of the organization. Please contact the Rhode Island Disability Law Center at 831-3150, 1 (800) 733-5332, or TTY 831-5335 to request a training.

This is the 22nd newsletter of the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project. This newsletter includes updates about the Project, notices about local disability events, and action alerts either sponsored by the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project or referred to us by other disability organizations. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, or if you know of someone else who would like to be added to the list, please email Lee Strauss. Her email address is ampersand1@cox.net. Please email project organizer Jean Lawlor at ridvp@ridvp.org if you have items that you would like to submit for future newsletters.

Attachments:

This newsletter