

# Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights 2013 Legislative Session Report

## SUMMARY

### Disability Awareness Day

The Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights and the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council once again hosted the annual **Disability Awareness Day** on March 28<sup>th</sup> at the Vermont Statehouse.

This year's theme was the **Celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Closing of the Brandon Training School**. Hundreds of people with disabilities participated in the day's events, including: being introduced on the House Floor, visiting legislative committees, providing testimony, attending workshops and informational sessions, meeting with their legislators and speaking out on the State Budget funding for Disability Services.

The day ended with appetizers, a keynote speaker and a panel discussion about "Moving Beyond the Barriers People with Disabilities Still Face 20 years after the Closing of Brandon Training School". **Curtis L. Decker**, Executive Director of National Disability Rights Network, the nation's largest non-governmental enforcer of disability rights gave the keynote.

Others speakers and panel members included: **Bill Ashe**, Executive Director of Upper Valley Services, supporting people with developmental disabilities for over 40 years; **Gail Falk**, who has had a distinguished career closing institutions in Vermont and West Virginia and building strong individualized supports for people with disabilities in their communities; and **Larry Bissonnette**, an advocate, artist and subject of two award winning films, including *Wretches & Jabberers*, a global quest to change attitudes about disability and intelligence.

Numerous articles highlighted the Disabilities Services Budget and awareness of the Brandon Training School history and experiences. (*See full articles at end of the report*)

Quotes from Articles:

**Deborah Lisi-Baker**, a disability rights activist said, *"We must never forget how leaders in the eugenics movement wrongly said that people with developmental disabilities should be segregated, or sterilized, or both."*

**Nicole LeBlanc**, a young activist who has autism said, *"I was shocked to see the photos of how people lived when institutionalized at Brandon Training School. It is frightening to think how just 20 years ago, my sisters and brothers with disabilities were banished to a life of isolation and total segregation."*