



President's Message

The Winds Around Us

Terry Crocker, AAIDD Texas Chapter President

After a summer filled with the devastating winds of Hurricanes Dolly and Ike, the wind is blowing hard again – only now it is the wind of political change.

At a federal level our historic presidential inauguration has, in my opinion, left a sense of hope in this country at a level that has not been felt in many years – even in the face of many complex national problems of incredible magnitude. I have hope that given the campaign rhetoric, there will be a renewed awareness of our society's responsibility to, and the level of need of, people with I.D.D. and their families as the federal decision makers move forward. Certainly meeting that responsibility becomes more difficult as economic conditions worsen. The decisions the new president and administration make will shape the economic and social landscape of this country for generations to come.

Closer to home and as of this writing, the 81st Legislative Session is just underway in Texas and there are already a number of issues arising that will have significant impact on people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in our state. The struggles of some state schools and Department of Justice involvement is prompting debate on the possible closure of some or all of the facilities (see point/counterpoint article in this newsletter). As always, funding allocations for the Department of Aging and Disabilities will be a major driver of whether services for people with I.D.D. will increase, decrease or stay the same. The budget deficit currently predicted, regardless of its exact amount, always concerns those of us in the human services arena. Approximately 32% of the state's entire expense budget is allocated to health spending for 2008-2009*. With

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AAIDD Texas Chapter Membership Report

Ellis M. (Pat) Craig - AAIDD Texas Chapter Board Member

As of January 1, 2009 there were 107 AAIDD members from Texas. In September 2008 we had 197 members. Hopefully, most of this difference is members not getting around to renewing their membership for the new year. If this applies to you, please renew your membership soon!

The benefits of membership are numerous. Receiving the award winning journals tops the list. AAIDD's two journals are the most respected in the field of intellectual disabilities, one focusing on important research and the other addressing policy and practice issues. Access to ongoing continuing education through teleconferences is available, with both local and national presenters. There are financial incentives as well, with lower registration rates for conferences and discounts on AAIDD's quality publications.

Finally, opportunities to participate in policy development and legislative recommendations are available through AAIDD Texas Chapter.

If you are truly invested in this field, AAIDD should be your professional and advocacy home.

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40% of the budget being taken up by education, highways and prisons – historically the ‘hands-off’ areas for Texas politicians – any service under ‘health spending’ will go through the legislative session with a bulls-eye on its back. Luckily, we have a number of great champions for our cause among Texas Legislators, and I am

confident they will fight to not only keep us from sliding backwards, but to continue pushing Texas towards improvement and accessibility for those in need of services.

Please find the time to send your elected officials a note, email, or phone call to emphasize what you feel is important for the people

we serve. Most people would be extremely surprised at the impact that can be made with legislators by someone who is dedicated to a worthy cause.

Thanks to everyone for your continued support of our organization and I look forward to seeing everyone in Corpus Christi this July!

34th Annual Convention Committee

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MHMRA of Harris County

Eva Aguirre
Program/Silent Auction
The Center

Kirk Coats
Exhibitors/Sponsors
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Stipends
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Program/Local Arrangements/
Consumer Stipends
Austin Travis County MHMR Center

Karrie Shogren, Ph.D.
Program/Consumer Stipends
The University of Texas at Austin

Bob Welsh
Awards
MHMR of Tarrant County

Dion White
Local Arrangements/Program
Central Plains Center

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars for the 34th Annual Convention of AAIDD Texas Chapter! The 2009 Convention will be held at the beautiful Omni Hotel in Corpus Christi on July 15 through 19.

Once again, the Convention Committee is planning sessions that address the areas suggested by the participants of the previous convention and by the members of AAIDD Texas Chapter. If you would like to suggest topics or ideas for this year's convention, let the committee know through the chapter website at www.aaidtx.org.

We'll see you in Corpus Christi!

Maria Quintero, Ph.D.
AAIDD Texas Chapter President Elect
Convention Committee Chair

Student Scholarships Available

Lisa Shelby, AAIDD Texas Chapter Board Member

The AAIDD Texas Chapter Board of Directors is pleased to announce the availability of four \$500.00 Nova Lee Dearing Scholarships for students who are pursuing their education in a disability field or a related field. To be considered the applicant must be a full or part-time student at an accredited Texas College or University and be registered for one or more

classes in a disability related topic. Applicants will be required to submit proof of class enrollment; a transcript evidencing a minimum 2.5 GPA; a letter of recommendation from a faculty member or employer; and a brief description of their interest in the disability field. Current AAIDD membership is not required, but student membership in AAIDD is always

encouraged! For more information about applying or donating to the Nova Lee Dearing Scholarship, please contact the AAIDD Texas Chapter at lisa.shelby@atcmhmr.com or stop by the AAIDD Texas Chapter exhibit table at our 2009 Annual Convention.

Should State Schools Be Closed?

Ellis M. (Pat) Craig, Ph.D., Kimberly Littlejohn & Shelly Heck
AAIDD Texas Chapter Board Members

Texas has a long history of institutional (state schools) services to people with intellectual disabilities. The oldest facilities date to the early part of the 20th century. Until the 1970s these facilities were the primary service delivery option for this population. Development of community-based alternatives and special education then began widening the options, but there continued to be an expansion of the state school system. As many as 14,000 individuals resided in these facilities during the 1970s. Increased community placement efforts, including development of community-based services by state school staff, gradually led to a decrease in the census. A class action lawsuit, *Lelsz v. Kavanagh*, resulted in even more aggressive community placement efforts and the closure of two state schools.

In recent years critics and supporters of state schools have debated their merits. Some advocates argue that all state school residents can be served more appropriately in community settings and that all the state schools should be closed. State school supporters argue that the extensive needs of some individuals can best be met in a specialized setting.

Nationally, it is clear that the number of individuals served in such facilities is decreasing, with several states having none. Nevertheless, there is also a national trend to use such facilities for specialized populations, particularly the medically fragile and, separately, individuals with psychiatric/behavioral/criminal problems.

It is likely that the Texas Legislature will address the closure issue in this session. Several pieces of legislation calling for a study of state school closure have already been drafted. Thus, it is essential that professionals in the field of intellectual disabilities be informed of the benefits and risks of a closure process. Following are some of the key points:

Point

1. All state school residents can be served in community-based settings.
2. Community-based services are more cost-efficient.
3. Community-based services are of higher quality because of the increased individual attention.
4. Individuals are safer in small community settings than in large institutions.
5. Increased community integration is only possible when living in a community-based setting.
6. People living in state schools should have the choice to move to a community setting with funding for necessary supports.

Counterpoint

1. Some individuals have such extensive needs, particularly behavioral and medical, that a specialized facility and staff are essential.
2. There are undeniable cost-efficiencies only possible with larger facilities.
3. Individual attention and quality services are more dependent on the staff than the setting.
4. There is more staff oversight and faster access to key medical and behavior support staff in state school settings.
5. Community participation activities do occur for state school residents, and there is an easily accessed community at the state school; isolation is less likely to occur.
6. Families and individuals with an intellectual disability should have the choice to move to and remain in a state school setting.



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