

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR:

This is the Georgia Chapter of AAMR's first official online newsletter. Given that the price of *EVERYTHING* has gone up lately, we thought we would try our newsletter online. If you are a member and would prefer your newsletter to arrive in the mail, not to worry. Just contact me and I will make sure you get a copy in the next few days via snail mail. I can be reached at: 2660 Osborne Road Atlanta, GA 30319 404 231-9363

We have GREAT plans for the next year.

February 16-17, 2006 The Georgia Chapter of AAMR will be co-sponsoring the **Creative Expression Conference with **Georgia College & State University** and the **Baldwin Service Center** in Milledgeville.

Our Spring 2006 conference, **TRANSITIONS, will be April 20th at the Clairmont Presbyterian Church in Decatur. We will present the latest information and resources on lifespan transitions for persons with developmental disabilities.

**Our first annual Georgia Chapter of AAMR membership drive will be in May 2006. This will be a gathering for current and potential AAMR members. Details will be available in our February newsletter.

As always, we want to make sure we are keeping members informed about events that involve developmental disabilities. It is our hope that the calendar of events in this newsletter will be an opportunity for you to share important dates. Please contact us at sarac356@comcast.net if you would like to share an event date.

Looking forward to another great year!!!
Sara Case

Georgia's New Medicaid Waiver for Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Steve Hall, Director of the office of Developmental Disabilities, recently presented information regarding the new Medicaid waiver to a group of stakeholders. The waiver will consist of two waivers: one for support services (day) and one for comprehensive services (residential). The waivers will include individualized budgeting, community connection services, dental services, increased participant direction opportunities, consumer-directed natural support enhancement, support coordination, allowance for extenuation circumstances payment, transportation services and behavioral support services. There will be no new money in the waiver. This will be a restructuring of the waiver and how individuals can select individualized supports.

Individuals, families, and providers are strongly encouraged to attend sessions that will be held around the state to specifically discuss the new Medicaid Waiver. Dr. Hall will be conducting the meetings. See page 2 for dates, times, locations....

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

Georgia Chapter of AAMR Executive Committee meetings

Nov 18, 2005 10:30-2pm
Jan 13, 2006 10:30-2pm
2660 Osborne Road Atlanta, GA
Bring your lunch

Creative Expression Conference Co Sponsored by AAMR

February 16-17, 2006
Milledgeville, GA.

Bregman Education Conference

March 11-12, 2006
Perimeter College

Georgia Chapter of AAMR Spring Conference

April 20, 2006
Clairmont Presbyterian Church

AAMR Membership

There's no better time to become a member of AAMR. If you have let your membership lapse or if you have never been a member before, you can join on-line at www.aamr.org. Being a member means having access to the latest information on research, resources and programs related to the field of developmental disabilities. Memberships are offered to individuals or organizations so go to www.aamr.org to see which membership plan works best for you. **DON'T DELAY, JOIN TODAY!**



HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!

Statewide Forums on Georgia's New Medicaid Waivers for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities

Mon., Nov. 28, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where: Brown Conference Center at Hamilton Medical Center
1200 Memorial Drive, **Dalton, GA**

Contact: georgiabennett@highlandrivers.org

Sponsors: Highland Rivers, Department of Human Resources, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addictive Diseases, Office of Developmental Disabilities

Tuesday, Nov. 29, 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Where: Peachtree Middle School
4664 North Peachtree Road, **Atlanta, GA**

Contact: Crystal@aadd.org

Sponsors: Department of Human Resources, The Atlanta Alliance on Developmental Disabilities, The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, DeKalb Developmental Disabilities Council, Jewish Family and Career Services, Parent to Parent of Georgia, Unlock the Waiting Lists! Campaign and the Georgia Learning Resources System (GLRS)

Thurs., Dec. 1, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where: Dougherty County Government Building, Room 100
222 Pine Avenue, **Albany, GA**

Contact: swilliams@albanygaarc.org

Sponsor: Albany Arc

Mon., Dec. 5, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where: Coastal Center for Developmental Services, Inc.
Cafeteria in the Chatham Industries Building
1249 Eisenhower Drive, **Savannah, GA**

Contact: fmerkert@ccds-sav.org

Sponsor: Coastal Center for Developmental Services, Inc.

The draft applications for the new waivers for Georgia's citizens with developmental disabilities are available on the DHR-MHDDAD web page (<http://mhddad.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-MHDDAD>) under the News Section.

The Division seeks your input. Please send your written comments to Dr. Steve Hall, Director, Office of Developmental Disabilities, by December 10, 2005 at srhall1@dhr.state.ga.us.

ARTICLES

HURRICANE RELIEF AND GEORGIA

**Article submitted by Dr. Stephen Hall
Director Georgia Office of Developmental Disabilities**

I was speaking with a mother in the Hurricane Katrina relief line on the Southside of Atlanta when she told me that she was an elementary school teacher, her husband worked in an assembly factory for 18 years and they had these two children. They left the New Orleans suburbs two days ahead of the hurricane and stayed in a nice motel about 8 hours north and east of the storm's projected path. They barely saw rain. But when they returned home, their home, jobs, and their children's schools were all lost. Everything they owned was gone and the credit card company had cancelled their cards. Their bank was closed. They did everything they could do. They were just like you and me. Now they were broke, in Atlanta, Georgia, with no money, and no access to money. They were in line.

As media images filled our television screens from New Orleans, were we picturing elementary school teachers and loyal 18 year employees and their children leaving for safety two days before the storm came on shore? Is that who we thought the people standing in lines at the Red Cross Service Centers in Atlanta really were? Well, that is exactly who they are. They are people exactly like you and me and our children.

Research has shown that citizens with developmental disabilities are assumed to have IQ scores that vary by 40 points depending on the setting where they are seen. When asked to estimate the IQ scores of persons with disabilities when they are congregated and segregated with other persons with developmental disabilities and then asked to estimate the IQ scores of the same persons in real jobs, homes, and locations throughout their communities alongside citizens without disabilities, researchers found estimated IQ scores to be as much as 40 points higher when people are in the real community.

Your perceptions, your expectations, are what are real. When citizens with developmental disabilities are seen by us and the rest of the public in places that have the same high community expectations as the rest of us, then our expectations and the real possibilities for people who happen to have a developmental disability can soar.

People with developmental disabilities, like Americans from New Orleans, are in a situation through no fault of their own. The water broke a much-in-need-of-repair levy. Maybe it's time to lay our "people just need to take personal responsibility" mallets down for a moment, and take some responsibility for the well-being of our fellow Americans from New Orleans, those with Developmental Disabilities, and like the one man I met at Dobbins Air Force Base who was both.

ALLIANCE FOR FULL PARTICIPATION

**Article submitted by Dave Blanchard
Chair Elect, Georgia Chapter of AAMR**

Forgive my sense of optimism and hope: it comes from several real accomplishments over the past year. During the last legislative session we experienced strong agreement from the Department of Human Resources, Governor Perdue and the General Assembly that the waiting lists for the MRWP and ICWP waivers and a rate increase for disability providers needed to be addressed in the 2006 fiscal year. We were successful in advocating for 925 waiver slots for people waiting for supports under the MRWP and 46 new slots for people waiting for supports under the Independent Care Waiver program. In addition, a 4.5% rate increase for Medicaid supports under the MRWP was funded because of the tenacious leadership from the Service Provider Association for Developmental Disability (SPADD) and other organizations.

As we approach the 2007 legislative session, we again enjoy the strong recommendation from the Department of Human Resources to unlock Georgia's waiting lists by another 1,500 slots, the same number laid out in the multiple year funding plan create by the Departments of Community Health and Human Resources. We will also see a continued effort to keep the current provider resources in pace with inflation with an agenda that includes a 6% rate increase for Grant in Aid state funded supports and a 3% increase for all supports under the MRWP. **Your involvement is crucial.** We have learned from our past that without a strong and unified voice we will not see any improvements.

These legislative efforts will occur amid other initiatives led by the Governor's Office and the Office of Developmental Disabilities to reform Medicaid programs and the Disability related waivers respectively. Both efforts are moving at breakneck speed this fall with hopes that new waivers will be submitted for approval to the federal government in the early winter of 2006. Because these changes have the potential to impact disability supports in profound ways, we will be working to track their progress and alert others as more information is available and when your action is needed.

It is clear that the recent success of our advocacy was achieved through a unity and focus from our many different interests. While we should celebrate our recent achievements, in our next six months we will no doubt face difficult challenges that may tempt us to circle around our own issues. However, our best chance for continued success is to resist these temptations. After all, a common vision often comes at the price of compromising a single perspective and while it is true that we will all need to voice solutions that stem from our own challenges and realities, we must stay unified in our belief that improvement is long overdue and actually possible in Georgia.

**Article submitted by Barbara Coleman Past Chair, Georgia Chapter of AAMR
Valerie J. Bradley President, National AAMR**

Alliance for Full Participation

On September 22 and 23, 2005, in the midst of urgent natural disasters and war, 2,400 Americans who live with lifelong disabilities, their family members and the people who work along side them, came together in partnership to participate in a ground breaking event. Eleven disability organizations, including AAMR, were involved in a historical summit – the **Alliance for Full Participation** conference in Washington DC. The meeting was notable for a legion of reasons not the least of which was that a substantial number of the attendees were either self advocates or family members. It was a time to reconnect with old friends, to share ideas, and to recommit ourselves to the shared mission of improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities.

Under the banner of **"Many Voices, One Vision,"** these 11 organizations representing people with disabilities, family members, policy makers and administrators, advocates, professionals, researchers, and people who provide support to people with developmental disabilities put away their organizational differences and came together to affirm a set of common aspirations for the future.

Among the affirmations (the full text of which can be found on the AAMR website), was a commitment to cease the placement of children in institutions, to develop plans for the closure of remaining large public institutions, to favor real jobs and real volunteer opportunities over sheltered workshops, to provide the support needed by all families with sons and daughters with lifelong disabilities; to include people with disabilities wherever decisions are being made about their destinies; to eliminate the term mental retardation in favor of a less hurtful term, to support individual control over budgets and supports, to pay direct support professionals a decent wage, to reform Medicaid to promote inclusion, and to nurture inclusive communities.

Implementation of this vision will continue to be the task of the newly constituted alliance as well as the state teams that came together in Washington as they carry the message of the Summit back to their communities.

Here is what the diverse group of American leaders at the Summit believes must happen to make our vision a reality:

For states that still fund public and private institutions, we want to see a plan to close them over the next few years and people with lifelong disabilities supported to live in communities, in regular houses and regular neighborhoods. Starting today we expect all states to stop placing children in institutions and segregated residential schools.

People want real jobs with real pay, real businesses and volunteer opportunities, not sheltered workshops and day programs. Just because a person has a disability does not mean that person cannot contribute to our communities.

Families with sons and daughters with lifelong disabilities often need some support to have equal access to full and rich family lives. Having a child (who may be an adult now) with a disability must not force a family into poverty or constant, lifelong worry. While some have support to lead decent lives, others have not and are isolated and feel abandoned by America. Everyone who needs it must get the support they need.

People with disabilities must be part of all planning, governance, leadership and implementation of the programs that affect us. As Self Advocates Becoming Empowered has so aptly stated, "Nothing about us without us."

The term mental retardation has become hurtful. Stop using it! Words hurt and labels limit human potential. It is un-American. Try calling people by their name.

Public funds expended on behalf of people with developmental disabilities must be under their control and direction and, for children and others who need it, their families and trusted friends.

People who have chosen to work in this field directly with people with developmental disabilities should be paid a decent wage with benefits; they should not have to work two or three jobs just to support their families. This is important work that must be respected.

Medicaid is the vital lifeline for people with developmental disabilities. Medicaid reform must protect access to this program, promote inclusion for people in their communities and empower citizens to control the funds spent on their behalf.

Inclusive communities are part of the solution. Inclusive communities support all people, and make limited public funds go farther, to help those in need.

America is changing and becoming more diverse. We must understand and honor this diversity, and include all people in planning, governing and participating in communities.

Poverty limits human potential. Jobs, opportunities to start businesses, build assets, and be a part of communities, help all Americans.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families are often pitted against people with other severe, chronic and lifelong disabilities in American politics at all levels. We want to work toward the same ends as other people with disabilities. Together. We speak for ourselves and welcome positive coalitions with others.

Teams are working in each state to implement our vision and goals. Citizens, governors, state legislators and policymakers must help all of us reach this vision. If you want to join with us to create a more inclusive America, we welcome you at:

www.AllianceForFullParticipation.org

NATIONAL AAMR

Article submitted by Valerie J. Bradley President, National AAMR

AAMR had an annual meeting the day before the Summit (**Alliance for Full Participation**) that included a description of some of the exciting new action teams that are being proposed (i.e. exploring the implications of the Medicare Drug benefit for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, and creating a coalition to enrich and expand opportunities for self-determination) and the emerging plans for newly constituted divisions (i.e., nursing, and religion and spirituality). During lunch we heard from three young members (a postdoctoral fellow, a junior faculty member and a student) – Anna Esbensen, Julia Scherba de Valenzuela and Amy Drahota – about what they value in a professional organization. The Conference and the Assembly met and we concluded a full day with the Presidential Address by David Coulter and the AAMR awards ceremony.

Priorities

The Board also had a short meeting before the Summit and discussed strategic priorities for the organization in the next year. Four goals were set:

- To align the mission of the organization and the work of the members with the organization's identity and its name;
- To empower the grass roots of AAMR by continuing to urge communities of interest to form action teams and to stimulate the development of action plans for professional and geographic interests
- To continue to identify, attract and support new leadership in AAMR and in our field;
- To develop training initiatives with the support of professional and geographic interests (e.g., surrounding health issues, environmental issues, etc.).

Please feel free to comment on these goals and let me know if you are interested in supporting any of these initiatives.

Organizational Identity

As noted in my summary of the affirmations growing out of the Summit, there was a strong consensus among the 2400 attendees that the term "mental retardation" has to go. I know that in time another term may also be stigmatizing. I know that our name is well known in research and academic circles. I know that some will argue that "mental retardation" is a term of art in statutes. I also know that there will be concerns that a name change may jeopardize our work on terminology and classification. However, I believe that all of these issues can be addressed and resolved and our core mission preserved. **In the end, if we want to continue to be among the leaders in our field, then we must show self advocates and families that they have been heard "**

The AAMR Board voted to change its name about 6 years ago. Since then, however, we have been unable to arrive at a consensus about what name to embrace. I would like to begin a structured process that will result in what I hope is a resolution to this pending question. The following is the process that I hope we can pursue:

1. I would like to invite suggestions from the membership regarding what the organization should be called. Please visit the AAMR website and register your nominations or send them to me at vbradley@hsri.org.
2. In December, at the Mid Winter Leadership Meeting, we will review the suggestions and arrive at a manageable list.
3. The list will be reviewed to ensure that the names are consistent with the research, scientific and philosophical mission of the organization;
4. A short discussion paper will be prepared listing the pros and cons of each new name;
5. The list will be put before the membership for a vote.

I am hoping that this entire process will be completed by the end of my term on July 1, 2006 and that we will arrive at a generally agreeable resolution to an issue that has complicated our organizational deliberations and that has become an increasing barrier to communication with those for whom we do what we do.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to this organization that has become an integral part of many of our professional careers. After this extraordinary Summit, I am very optimistic that we can take the next steps that will bring AAMR closer to its mission and that will align us with the affirmations that we all made in Washington DC last month.

Valerie J. Bradley President, AAMR

**WATCH FOR THE NEXT GEORGIA
CHAPTER OF AAMR NEWSLETTER
DUE OUT IN MID-FEBRUARY**