

THE OUTLOOK

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH NEWSLETTER



The State of Alabama has officially recognized March as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month as of March 1, 2021.
Photo: Kimberly Boswell, Commissioner of ADMH and Darryle Powell, Executive Director of the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities (ACDD) present the Proclamation, along with ACDD staff.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

March is National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. The theme for this year's campaign is *"Moving Towards Change,"* which seeks to raise awareness about the inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all facets of community life, and awareness of the work that remains to remove barriers to community living. Developmental disabilities affect millions of individuals as well as their concerned families and friends. Those with disabilities continue to be marked by stigma and discrimination based on preconceived notions and misinformation.

This month offers another opportunity to support compassionate and devoted efforts to increase independence, employment in all communities. Education and work to increase access to services across the state is the mission of the Alabama Department of Mental Health, our Division of Developmental Disabilities, and service providers around the state.

IN THIS ISSUE

MAR / APR 2021

DD Awareness Month	FC
Volunteers of America	2
Respect Initiative - Graduation Day	3
Community Waiver Program Launches	4
Arc of Walker County and NW	5
Harper Center's First Staff Member	6
Sharing Empathy, Care and Resources	6
Arc of Shelby County and Laura Smith	7
IPS - Supported Employment	8
Regional Autism Network	10
The ADMH Office of Autism Services	11
Congratulations to Steve Hamerdinger	13
Did You Know?	14
Risk Management Information	BC

Want to be included in the next issue? Send us your stories, achievements, initiatives, events...etc!

publicinformation.dmh@mh.alabama.gov | 334-242-3417

PROVIDER SHOWCASE:

VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA

Volunteers of America (VOA) was founded in 1896 by social reformers, Ballington and Maud Booth. For 125 years, VOA has been serving the country's most vulnerable individuals and has become one of the nation's largest and most comprehensive human services organizations. The organization employs 16,000 paid professionals, touching the lives of 1.5 million people a year. VOA is a faith-based organization that operates 30 affiliates in 46 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The VOA Southeast (VOASE) affiliate serves Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, and began in 1980, with the provision of residential services to individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Mobile, Alabama. Today, we serve over 400 people with intellectual disabilities in AL and GA and have recently become a certified provider of ID Services in MI. In addition, we provide a number of other services including affordable housing, behavioral healthcare, including addictions treatment, disaster recovery, homeless prevention, and services for at-risk children and youth.



GUEST COLUMNIST
DEANNA FERGUSON,
VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT
AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS, VOASE

We also operate a number of programs under contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Labor including Grant and Per Diem, Transition in Place, Supportive Services for Veterans Families, and the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program.

VOA Southeast has over 700 employees across the three states and serves over 2,000 people each day through our direct service programs. In addition, we serve over 8,000 people annually through our community outreach programs by distributing food, clothing, blankets, toys, and meeting other important needs.

My grandmother always told me to find a job that you love, and you will never have to work again. I followed her advice. I love what I do—so I guess you can say I have “not worked” at VOA for over 27 years serving in various roles. I was born and raised in Opp, Alabama. My parents still live there, as well as my sister who is a special education teacher at Pleasant Home School. I have lived in Mobile for over 20 years and I enjoy spending time with my husband, Keith, and our 13 year-old daughter Kate.

Currently, I serve as Vice President of Government and Community Affairs. I engage with various local and state agencies, as well as advocacy organizations to ensure that the voices of those we serve are heard. I also look for service needs in various communities and assist our operations division to determine how we can meet those needs.

Prior to VOA Southeast, I had the opportunity to oversee an AmeriCorps Program focused on gang prevention for the VOA Colorado affiliate in Denver. Prior to that, I had the pleasure of serving adults with intellectual disabilities at East Central Mental Health in Troy, while in graduate school.

In college at Troy University, I interned at a long-term care facility for seniors. Several young individuals with intellectual disabilities resided there because they required skilled nursing care, and at that time there were very limited options. I remember feeling sad that these children and young adults were secluded and unable to interact and make friends their own age. That experience sparked my interest in pursuing a career working with people with disabilities and advocating for community service options.

I am pleased to serve as Board President of the Alabama Service Providers Association (ASPA), an inclusive association of community based ID/DD service providers. Our mission is to improve services to people with ID/DD in Alabama through leadership, advocacy, and education regarding best practices and public policy. I strongly encourage all ID/DD service providers

in Alabama to join our association and mission. I am also honored to serve on the Disabilities Leadership Coalition of Alabama (DLCA) board and the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR) Board of Representatives.

I'm very excited to celebrate Developmental Disability (DD) Awareness this month. This is a great opportunity to educate others on the many abilities and contributions of people with ID/DD and the importance of full community inclusion. We should take this opportunity to discuss barriers people with ID/DD face in accessing community life and employment options.

Contact Information: www.aspanow.com
(251) 421-3003, deanna@voase.org

THE RESPECT INITIATIVE: GRADUATION DAY!

The RESPECT Initiative held its 11th graduation on, February 26 and March 5. Participants were recognized for their efforts in completing the program. The training participants receive allows them to feel more confident and more in control of their own life experiences, as they learn new skills and techniques to help rebuild their lives. The Initiative has grown significantly since beginning in Spring 2018 at ADMH.

The RESPECT Initiative supports participants in learning how to articulate their personal stories of recovery from mental health and substance use challenges. One of the program's objectives is to help participants get clarity on their lived experiences and to realize that their illnesses, addictions or traumas can be placed in the context of a positive story – a story that can inspire and educate decision makers like legislators and administrators, clinical personnel, direct care givers, students and of course, peers.

Participants who graduate from the RESPECT Initiative learn how to take overwhelming experiences with their illness and recovery, hone-in on what is important to them and what they would like others to know about their experiences in a 10-minute presentation. Since the program's inception, 85 individuals have graduated from the program and gone on to share their stories with others.

Program graduate, Alicia Calloway said during her presentation that she's not going to let her mental illness stop her from being successful. "The advice that I have for my peers is that, 'this too

shall pass', some things may be hard during that moment, however, there is going to be a day when you wake up and you'll realize that you're stronger now than you were before," explained Calloway.

Calloway says in the future she wants to continue working her way up the ladder in the mental health field and she plans to attend graduate and become a counselor.

The Spring 2021 graduates include:

Phillip Pearson	Melanie Evans
Helena Doering	Jerome Dorsey
Alisia Calloway	Donnetta Wilson
Adriene LaPorte	La'Nissi Brown
Teala Frost	Andrew Phillips

Office of Peer Programs Director Michael Autrey says these recovery stories effectively alleviate stigma by engendering empathy and understanding. It's important for the graduates to share their stories, there is something powerful about each one," said Autrey.



DD AWARENESS MONTH SUCCESS STORY

The mission of the Arc is to advocate for the rights and protections of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families, and the Arc of Walker County is no different. The Arc of Walker County was established in 1975 and has expanded its programs to include Day Programs, Community Living Homes, Supported Living, and Supported Employment for adults. Despite the recent COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Arc of Walker County was able to serve and support the needs of nearly 340 individuals with disabilities.

At the onset of the pandemic, individuals with intellectual and development disabilities were affected in many ways, including the loss of access to trained caregivers or community service providers. For the Arc of Walker County, many of its programs require physical proximity to staff members and caregivers in order to bridge the communication gap and make their day-to-day activities manageable and enjoyable. In response, the Arc took advantage of screen-based technologies including tele-visits to offer an interpersonal connection.

Lee Prestridge, the Arc of Walker County Finance and Resource Development Director says tele-visits have become a new normal for much of the services they offer.

“At the Arc of Walker County, everyone is still receiving services, just not at the same time,” explained Prestridge. *“Many of our individuals have been receiving teletherapy throughout the pandemic, and recently we have created split day programs to allow for smaller groups through social distancing.”*

For those that have continued to participate in the Arc’s programs, Prestridge says individuals continue to show progress and success. *“We all know that one success can lead to another and this is certainly the case when speaking of one of our clients, NW,”* noted Prestridge.

“She began receiving services at the Arc of Walker County in 2009 and her primary goal was to improve her social skills and have positive interaction with others. Through her person-centered plan, she began her journey with support from Day Program interactions,” explained Prestridge.

Early Intervention



Helping children develop and fulfill their potential

Supported Living provided companion services to assist NW with personal care and community involvement. As the Day Program evolved into Community Day activities, NW further improved her skills by participating in community service projects and taking advantage of volunteer opportunities with community partners such as the Humane Society.

“Through the Community Day programs NW learned about job opportunities in our area and by October 2020, she was employed,” said Prestridge. *“With the help of her Supported Employment Job Coach, she now works two days a week and has set a goal to increase her hours.”*

Prestridge added that because of the assistance and support NW has received, she is continuing to improve her social skills and is enjoying the freedom that the new independence brings.

As an accommodation to adding virtual opportunities, Prestridge says last year the Arc was able to expand its Early Intervention services to Coffee County, despite the county not being a part of its regular service area.

The Early Intervention program provides services to children from birth to age three with developmental delays. *“We provide speech, occupational, and physical therapy, as well as a family instructor to educate parents and guardians,”* she explained. *“This education allows the family to help the child overcome developmental delays and/or any barriers to their most independent life.”*

“Coffee county is an underserved county and the residents that have taken advantage of the program have benefited greatly from teletherapy.”

To learn more about the Arc of Walker County and their services, please visit <https://thearc.org/chapter/the-arc-of-walker-county/>.

THANK YOU HEALTHCARE HEROES

Alabama Department of Mental Health



THE FIRST STAFF MEMBER AT MARY STARKE HARPER

**STILL DEDICATED TO THE INDIVIDUALS SHE
SERVES, AFTER 26 YEARS**

Stephanie Turner, staff member at Mary Starke Harper, is the only Mental Health Worker at Harper who has been working at the facility since the day the doors were opened for patients in February 1996.

Recently, Ms. Turner received her COVID-19 Appreciation Pin from Associate Commissioner Dr. Tammie McCurry and was informed of this important information! Stephanie Turner has 26 years of service with Mental Health, where she worked one year at Bryce and 25 years at Harper.

Ms. Turner said, "This 24-year old lady came to work at Harper, and now this 50-year old is wiser. I knew this was a calling in my life." She continued, "I am the eyes and the ears for the patients; I am able to alert nurses and doctors to changes I see in a patient."

Stephanie Turner says she has seen a lot of patients and staff over time, but feels she is to be here, to help each one. "It is a blessing to work at Harper," she said.

Stephanie Turner, we congratulate you for being a charter member of Mary Starke Harper!

SHARING EMPATHY, CARE AND RESOURCES

WITH THE FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY

In February, the Alabama Department of Mental Health had a wonderful opportunity to present important mental health resources and discuss the devastating impact of COVID-19, personally invited by Reverend Cathey Bruce, Chaplain of Gaines Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dr. Tammie McCurry, Associate Commissioner for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, thoughtfully accepted the invite, and prepared to share the work of her division with the congregation of the church and a statewide audience that joined the Zoom session for the Ninth Episcopal District African Methodist Episcopal Church Annual Christian Education Training.

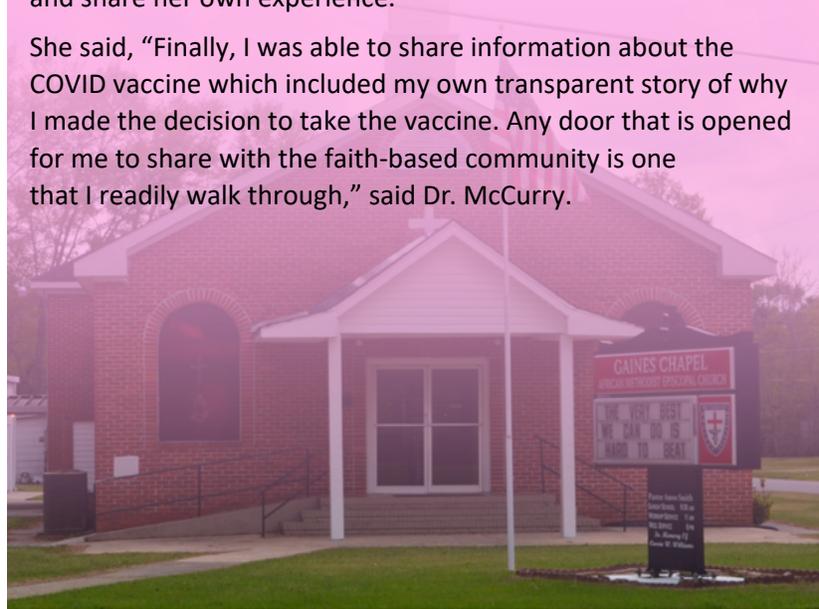
Over 200 participants were eager to hear more about what they could do to help their loved ones and themselves during this challenging time. Dr. Bruce said of the presentation, "Dr. McCurry's encouraging presentation not only opened the door to having conversations about mental health, but it opened the hearts of many to say, it is OK to discuss one's feelings about the devastation Covid-19 is causing in our lives and our spiritual communities."

Many attendees were grieving the loss of friends and family members, lost jobs or found themselves isolated and facing mental health issues due to the pandemic.

Dr. McCurry said, "Having an opportunity to share information about COVID 19 and its impact on mental health with faith-based community leaders was extremely rewarding. I encouraged Pastors and faith-based leaders to check on their church members during this time of isolation which has an impact on people in various ways."

In addition to speaking on issues of mental health and the needs and resources in communities around the state, Dr. McCurry was able to offer reassuring information about the COVID-19 vaccine and share her own experience.

She said, "Finally, I was able to share information about the COVID vaccine which included my own transparent story of why I made the decision to take the vaccine. Any door that is opened for me to share with the faith-based community is one that I readily walk through," said Dr. McCurry.





The Arc of Shelby County

DD AWARENESS MONTH SUCCESS STORY

Through the use of innovative employment support practices, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are able to contribute to their communities, while learning best practices that empower them to lead successful lives.

At the Arc of Shelby County's Project SEARCH program, Laura Smith is a participant in the transitional program for high school students between 18 and 21 years of age. Within the internships, they learn various job skills that helps to gain competitive employment within the community once the program is completed.



Laura Smith

Through Project Search, Smith received an opportunity to work in a community Women's Center creating packets for new mothers and distributed mail throughout a hospital. Following her completion of Project SEARCH, she was hired at Shelby Baptist Medical Center, where she sterilized blood pressure pumps and cuffs.

Smith was employed by Shelby Baptist Medical Center from 2012 to 2016. She later obtained her position with the North Shelby Library in 2016, with the assistance of the Employment Services Program at the Arc of Shelby County.



"Laura's duties at the library have increased through the years and include dusting shelves, cleaning DVDs or books, making cut-outs for bulletin boards, preparing books to be deleted, general cleaning duties, or making fun activity packets to be given out to children," explained Jennifer Ellison, Director of Development for the Arc of Shelby County. *"Laura often talks about how much she loves her job and it shows with her quality of work,"* she added.

Smith was recently surprised by her coworkers, with a socially distanced party to honor her five years of service at North Shelby Library. She was presented with an Oreo cheesecake from one of her favorite restaurants, a gift certificate, and flowers. Her name was also minted on a plaque that hangs in the library honoring employees for their years of service.

"Laura is respected for her hard work and loved by her fellow employees for her cheerful smile and positive attitude," noted Ellison.

Through advocacy, coaching, and support, the Arc of Shelby County empowers individuals with intellectual disabilities to achieve their goals. In 2019, the Arc of Shelby County served over 1,300 individuals through programs in early intervention, employment, and community living, as well as through a day program and residential program. For more information about The Arc of Shelby County visit <http://thearcofshelby.org/>

INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

RECOVERY, MENTAL WELLNESS, AND THE VALUE OF WORK

The **Alabama Department of Mental Health** (ADMH), in partnership with the **Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services** (ADRS) and community mental health centers are highlighting the success stories of *Individual Placement and Support (IPS) - Supported Employment*, with a series of testimonial videos of clients and employers, and the benefits of the program. The first video, showcasing IPS client, Turner W. and the story of his successful employment at Martha's Place in Montgomery, can be viewed [here](#), on the ADMH YouTube channel.

The partnering departments and community mental health centers support the recovery of people with mental illness through meaningful and competitive employment. Individual Placement and Support - Supported Employment is an evidence-based service model aimed to assist people with serious mental illness (SMI) and co-occurring substance use disorders, in obtaining and maintaining competitive jobs, based upon their preferences.

"We have seen the initial results of the IPS program, and it changes lives. The program is based on a recovery-oriented culture, grounded by mental wellness, acceptance and the beneficial value of work in an individual's life," said Commissioner Kim Boswell.

IPS offers the opportunity for increased self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and decreased dependence on others. Research demonstrates the IPS model has a high rate of success when provided as a mental health service to individuals who express interest in joining the workforce.

Since the inception of IPS services in Alabama in 2015, over 263 of Alabama's businesses have played a vital role in the success of individuals receiving employment. People receiving IPS -Supported Employment are more than twice as likely to gain competitive employment than individuals who receive [traditional employment] services (Brinchman, et al 2019).

IPS Teams are located in three areas of our state. Participating providers include the following:

- **AltaPointe Health** (Mobile)
- **Central Alabama Wellness** (Chilton and Shelby Counties)
- **Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority** (Montgomery)

"ADMH IPS-Supported Employment programs have helped over 180 adults with serious mental illness find employment. This is a huge success for the participants and our IPS teams, considering a high unemployment rate for the individuals we serve statewide.

Integrating IPS within the mental health system creates access for people who may not otherwise walk across the threshold of traditional employment programs," stated Jessica Hales, ADMH Coordinator of Adult Mental Illness Services.

Another crucial element of Alabama's IPS – Supported Employment programs are Peer Specialists who provide support by sharing their personal stories of recovery. They assist individuals, clinicians, and families to understand the benefits of employment and the positive impact work has on mental health. The connections between peer specialists and individuals inspire, motivate, and encourage success.

To learn more about the ADMH IPS-SE program, please contact Denise Bern, IPS Trainer and Coordinator at 334-353-0006 or denise.bern@mh.alabama.gov. To be connected in your area, please contact one of the three community mental health centers offering the program.

To learn more about IPS, visit the IPS Employment Center at <https://ipsworks.org/>

To learn more about Employment statewide, visit AlabamaWorks! at <https://alabamaworks.com>

Reference: Brinchman, et al. A meta-regression of the impact of policy on the efficacy of individual placement and support. (2019).



Peer Support



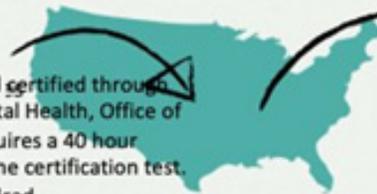
Who are peers?

Peers are individuals who use their lived experience and formal training to promote the recovery of others.

A peer can also use their experiential knowledge of mental health recovery to inform and improve research design and investigation

Do peers have training?

In Alabama, peers are trained and certified through the Alabama Department of Mental Health, Office of Peer Programs. Certification requires a 40 hour training program and passing of the certification test. Continuing education is also required.



Where do peers work?

Peers work in many settings including mental health rehabilitation, therapeutic recreation/socialization, transition from inpatient, crisis stabilization and vocational rehabilitation programs

What do peers do?



Who funds peer support?



In Alabama and over 40 other states, services provided by peers are Medicaid billable. Other sources of funding for peer's include grants, donations, waivers, general revenue and other dedicated funds

Does peer support work?

Research suggests peer support services...

- ✓ Reduce inpatient service use stays
- ✓ Improve relationships with providers
- ✓ Increase empowerment, hope and social relations
- ✓ Improve patient activation
- ✓ Reduce length of stays and crisis and emergency service use
- ✓ Enhance personal recovery and perceived recovery orientation of providers for people receiving support

[Sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/](http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/)

For more on Wings' peer programs & opportunities, contact:

Dalana W. Brooks, MA, CPS
Program Director
Wings Across Alabama
(251) 244-8339
dalanawbrooks@icloud.com
Together. We Thrive



www.WingsAcrossAL.org

**Certification and training is completed through ADMH. Please see their website for qualifications, application information at*

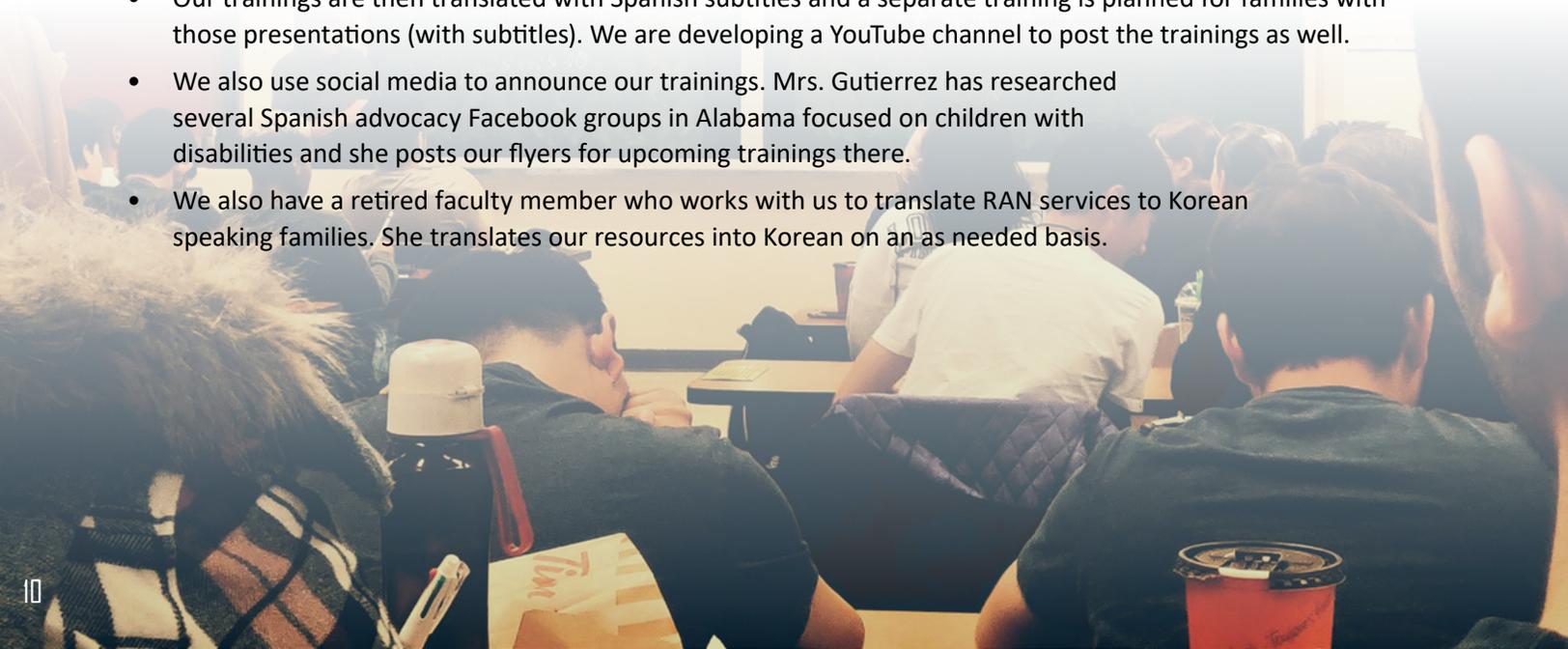


REACHING OUT IN NEW WAYS TO DIVERSE FAMILIES ACROSS THE STATE

Regional Autism Network **AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH FEATURE**

We provide direct assistance to families with children with ASD (or adults on the spectrum), technical assistance to professionals, conduct professional trainings (via zoom these days) and public awareness via a YouTube channel (in collaboration with the Autism Society of Alabama (ASA) and the other RANs).

- We continue to meet with families and professionals via phone or zoom as the Regional Autism Network.
- We connect them to resources and to each other individually based on need.
- We have enhanced our listserv emails that outline events across the state for families, self-advocates, and professionals.
- We also held a drive-thru resource fair at Easter Seals in Montgomery, also in collaboration with ASA.
- With our Hispanic Outreach grant for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) we reached out to those who provided letters of support in areas where there are higher numbers of Spanish speaking families.
- We provided a training to these agencies and their designated Spanish speaking advocates in January.
- We addressed unique challenges of Spanish speaking families with children with IDD in Alabama, school issues, the law and special education, behavior, parent education, recreation, advocacy development, as well as other basic needs.
- We are providing trainings once a month as well as meeting with families as needed. Our February training was on the Alabama Enable Act with speaker representatives. Our March presentation will be on advocacy presented by the Alabama Parent Education Center (APEC), and April will be on Special Education and the Law presented by the Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP).
- Maria Gutierrez, the RAN Family Navigator has been instrumental in assisting families across the state since her arrival from California 8 years ago. We have partnered in our efforts to provide outreach to families impacted by disability.
- Our trainings are then translated with Spanish subtitles and a separate training is planned for families with those presentations (with subtitles). We are developing a YouTube channel to post the trainings as well.
- We also use social media to announce our trainings. Mrs. Gutierrez has researched several Spanish advocacy Facebook groups in Alabama focused on children with disabilities and she posts our flyers for upcoming trainings there.
- We also have a retired faculty member who works with us to translate RAN services to Korean speaking families. She translates our resources into Korean on an as needed basis.



CONTINUED EXPANSION AND SUCCESS OF ADMH'S OFFICE OF AUTISM SERVICES

AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH FEATURE

ADMH's Office of Autism Services is just underway in its second year of providing home and community-based services to individuals and families across our state. In the first two years, Autism Services has provided general information and referrals to approximately 500 callers; participated in numerous education, planning, and outreach projects across the state; offered consultation and technical assistance to other state programs, enrolled nearly 100 clients, and built many valuable relationships with outside providers in order to collaboratively and effectively serve our individuals, our families, and beyond.

With the expected first-year obstacles, Autism Services, like most others, faced the unexpected and unprecedented challenges of COVID-19. Most notably, this made outreach and provider enrollment difficult at times, and face-to-face, in-person appointments (a cornerstone of Autism Services) were halted. Nevertheless, with strategic planning, leadership's guidance, and community partnership, Autism Services found a way to keep pressing forward to reach and serve individuals. Geared in personal protective equipment (PPE), Intensive Care Coordinators (ICCs) made home visits when needed. When home visits were not an option, video and teleconferencing allowed staff and clients to connect, offering a new means of providing support and encouragement.

Despite a different approach, staff have worked hard to meet client needs and connect families.



One family, who had faced a history of hospitalizations, shared with staff, *"My experience with your services has exceeded my expectations. You have helped find resources to help my daughter grow and have provided an ear of guidance."*

Another shared,

"I, as a grandmother raising a 7-year-old grandchild with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other issues, feel the ADMH has helped him so much. Despite the COVID, Ms. Erica Bradberry always makes sure we have what we need. Always answers my concerns about my grandson."



So, how has Autism Services done it?

With many children unable to attend school or any in-person services during the past year, ICCs have been creative and resourceful in helping families develop and implement simple tools and strategies in the home to help build structure and manage day-to-day activities. A mom of two enrolled children whose ICC helped her put together a picture communication system reported,

“Although I am still anxiously awaiting providers for services, I am very happy with Autism Services especially with... my coordinator! You always suggest really good resources, share things about your family to which I can relate, and I have suggested the program to many other families and potential providers for clients - did today actually!”

Autism Services has also worked hard during this time to build relationships with community partners to strengthen supports for individuals and families in settings where our services are not provided, such as schools. In Region III, our staff provided an awareness presentation to the Saraland City Schools board, and School-Based Mental Health Therapist Stephanie Pope reports the system’s guidance counselors and school social workers look forward to referring to our program and continued collaboration in the future. In other parts of the state, we have participated in drive-through outreach events in partnership with area RANs, collaborated with other state stakeholders like AEIS for program development, and even consulted with in-state colleges and universities on expanding training programs and provider capacity across Alabama. In some regions, we now have rehab service providers fully enrolled and are beginning to refer clients for more of our services, such as therapeutic mentoring, in-home therapy, and behavior support. Afiya Hooker, owner of Sunshine Haven Center (one of our first enrolled providers), is very engaged in what we are doing and says Sunshine Haven is eager to get started serving children and families with Autism Services.

In addition to these accomplishments, some of Autism Service’s biggest strides this year have been in providing better outreach and more inclusive services to Spanish-speaking families and the Hispanic community, as we recognize this is an ever-growing population in our state with their own unique needs and cultural perspectives. Through a contract with Arch Language Network & the assistance of other community partners, Autism Services is able to communicate with individuals and families in over 50 languages, with all documents and forms readily available in both English and Spanish. Excitingly, Autism Services also employs a native bilingual ICC who is able to provide *“cultural insight and bridges the gap when challenges arise.”* Jackie Navidad puts our mission best in her own words:

“I have assisted colleagues, advocated on behalf of families, and collaborated with community church leaders to meet families’ basic needs, among other autism services. There are many challenges in serving Hispanic families within our scope of work. However, we learn to work together for the mutual benefit of our children and families. There is much work ahead and it is important to be intentional and proactive within our communities.”

In a trying time, new services have brought a new hope and outlook about what the future can hold for many individuals and families impacted by autism in Alabama. Autism



Services is proud to be a part of that change, just ask our staff!

“To be able to offer these services to the autism community is very exciting to me due to the fact that they can sometimes be overlooked. I feel these services are needed to continue to increase the community’s knowledge and understanding of Autism.” -Yolanda Lapsley

“As an ICC, I feel that I am a valuable part of their lives by helping both the individual and family learn techniques and strategies to help with everyday life. I am able to use my experience and provide them with as many supports and resources as they may need. Families depend on our help and I am happy to be the bridge to help them to get to their destination.” -Latisha Wilson

As ADMH’s Autism Services has only just begun its endeavor to revolutionize our state’s system of care for individuals and families impacted by ASD. We will need partners and supporters from every corner to help ensure this endeavor is a successful and sustained one. We are always actively looking to grow our community partnerships, provider network, and clientele. If you or anyone you know could benefit from our services or would like to be a part of our amazing team, you can find more information on our website at <https://mh.alabama.gov/autism-services/>.

CONGRATULATIONS TO STEVE HAMERDINGER

RECIPIENT OF THE BOYCE R. WILLIAMS AWARD

Steve Hamerdinger, Director, Office of Deaf Services (ODS), Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) was announced recently as the recipient of the Boyce R. Williams Award, the highest award presented by the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA).

“To receive an award named after Boyce Williams is incredible and humbling. Dr. Williams was one of the most influential deaf men in the history of the United States,” Hamerdinger noted. *“He isn’t well known outside of human services, but almost every major advance in social services to deaf people can be traced directly to some initiative he either started or funded.”*

In 2015, Hamerdinger also received the Frederick C. Schreiber Award, which recognizes Dr. Fred Schreiber, the first Executive Director of the National Association of the Deaf, in recognition of his enduring commitment to ADARA. This award is given to an individual for outstanding contributions to ADARA.

Hamerdinger added he’s never dreamed of receiving these two honors years apart, as only one person had previously been awarded both the Schreiber Award and the Williams Award, Dr. William McCrone. *“When ADARA presented me with the Schreiber award, I was very grateful. Never did I dream they would also give me the Williams award some years later– it just doesn’t happen,”* Hamerdinger explained.

Hamerdinger has been at the helm of ODS, serving the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) for over 18 years. Nationally and internationally renowned, ODS serves 300 individuals who are deaf and more than 1,500 hard of hearing individuals with severe and persistent mental illnesses and trains hundreds of people in deaf mental health care annually.

Hamerdinger has played a pivotal role in the deaf mental healthcare community for nearly 30 years. Prior to his appointment at ADMH, he was the Director of the Office of Deaf and Linguistic Support Services at the Missouri Department of Mental Health for ten years. His career has expanded into owning and operating a mental health consulting firm that provides consultation and training on mental health and deafness. Hamerdinger’s commitment to supporting deaf services reminds everyone that there are no boundaries to what one can achieve.

“I grew up hearing statements such as, “You are deaf, you will never amount to anything. I would like to think I have proven those early distracters wrong,” Hamerdinger continued.



His motivation to support the deaf community comes from recognizing the importance of mental health care driven by deaf people.

“For us, By us. Nothing about us, without us,” noted Hamerdinger. *“As a deaf person who also lives with mental illness, this work is very real to me. I have been lucky and blessed in life. But far too many deaf people have not had the same opportunities I have had and have struggled with challenges far worse than mine. I feel that Providence called me to this work.”*

He noted that as he enters the late twilight of his career, his goal now is to effectively transition the program to a new generation of leadership, so the work thus far does not diminish.

“I’m grateful to Commissioner Kimberly Boswell and Associate Commissioner Dr. Tammie McCurry, for their support of developing a continuum of care for deaf people – including establishing a new deaf unit in our hospitals that can become the hub of crisis care, where deaf people can have access to American Sign Language fluent clinical care,” he explained.

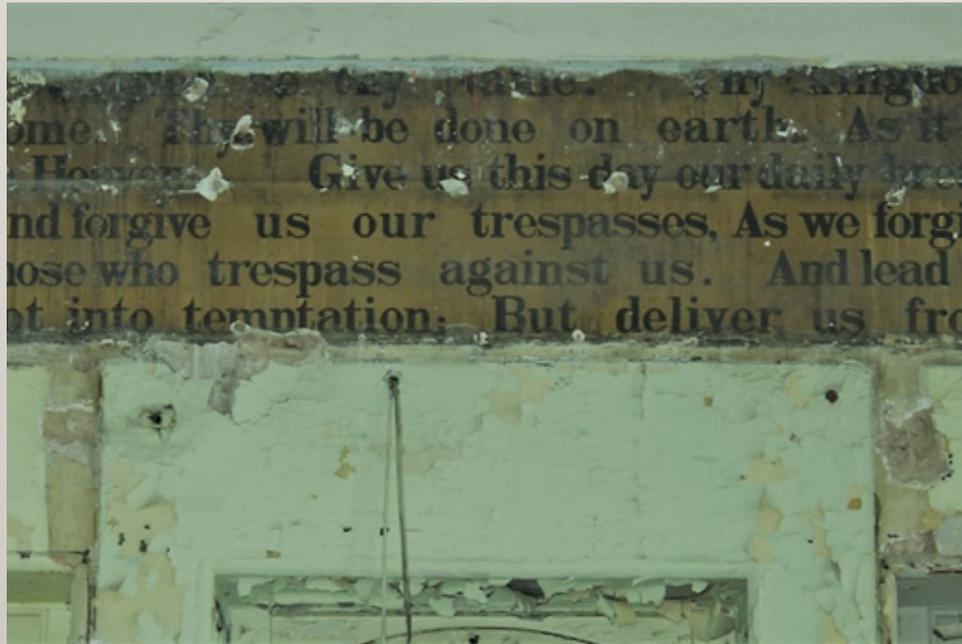
“This path for getting deaf services to where it should be has long been a dream of mine, and it is exciting to see the possibilities are there. I want the program to continue to build on those possibilities and aim for even greater things in the future.”



DID YOU KNOW?

When the University of Alabama began renovation of the Bryce Main Building in 2015, there were some very interesting items located in the walls and under the plaster?

The Lord's prayer was located under an added floor where it had been hidden for more than 140 years. A handmade dress was hidden in the wall between two bedrooms on 6-East. There were 12 original frescos hidden by the plaster in the auditorium that were painted at some point prior to 1916.



ALABAMA DIVISION OF RISK MANAGEMENT INFORMATION FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

The March 2021 **EAP Newsletter** is now available from the Division of Risk Management. Select the following link view the newsletter <https://riskmgt.alabama.gov/newsletters>

The Division of Risk Management has a new **portal**. Employees will be able to register for all EAP's quarterly trainings and their annual conference through this site. Manual registration is also available for employees that do not have access to email or internet.

In addition, please feel free to access their **Community Resource Directory**. EAP want to ensure our state employees have access to local resources. If you have a community resource that you would like to submit for consideration, please email EAP.Information@finance.alabama.gov.



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Takeshia Knox
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Keanthony Nixon
Tracy Stevenson
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Amber Bogan
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Kalin Davis
Aisha Gilbert
Jocelyn Glover
Carla Hayes
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