

**Intervention Subcommittee
Alabama Autism Task Force
Minutes of July 23, 2007**

Present:

Tim Ferguson, Chair
Bob Babcock, Ph.D.
Joe Carter
Caron Coats
Rebecca Dossett
Kim Hammack
Kerry Mataya
Jennifer Muller
Dr. Robert Simpson
Dr. Hanes Swingle
Rep. Cam Ward
Also, Tracey Battaglia, Clerk
and Alice Widgeon, Minutes

Absent:

Dr. Doug Adams
Amanda Bellmyer
Melody Crane
Jamie Cummings
Dr. Heather French
Dana Handmacher
Kristi Hubbard
Jessica Jacob
Dr. Shirley King
Dr. Russ Kirby
Dr. Laura Klinger
Mike Martin
Vicki Umbehagen
Teresa White

Welcome and Introductions:

Tim Ferguson, Chair, called the meeting to order, thanking Rep. Cam Ward for his leadership in this effort, indicating that as the father of a son with Asperger's Syndrome, he has high expectations of the task force. Today's meeting should serve to clarify the expectations of this subcommittee. The agenda included a discussion of existing programs: *Early Intervention, School Age, and Transition—Workplace and Living*—where interventions occur. It was noted that several members sent word that they were unable to attend today's meeting.

Rep. Ward, Chair of the AL Autism Task Force, indicated that his role is to help steer the subcommittees a bit and give advice on the political and governmental aspects, but the substantive work is to come from the subcommittees.

Introductions were made around the room. The Chairperson said that he had reviewed the literature given out at the full task force meeting and that he hoped one of the populations that could be focused on is the older school-age child, particularly those in the process of transition. He asked the membership what they hoped to see accomplished.

Mission Discussion:

Participants gave their special interest in the workings of this subcommittee and their perspectives on a supportive framework for those involved in direct interventions. Dr. Robert Simpson, AU indicated that AU's interest is more toward being a demonstration site for transition, rather than a direct service provider and that AU will provide autism training to ADRS, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. Dr. Swingle, USA, told of that entity's plans for an Autism Diagnostic Center and that education and behavior management should be focused upon as critical components for primary interventionists such as teachers and trainers. Universities can be the ongoing component and link to that training. He thinks improvements can be made in early intervention for the very young child with autism and advocated for an overall population-based approach. Dr. Babcock, Learning Tree, shared the priority on education and a research-based approach to interventions. He included that state personnel has no employment category for certified behavior analysts for the state or education systems. Dr.

Dossett, psychologist, spoke of the difference that ongoing supports could mean in the lives of adults with Asperger's Syndrome, employment, and pursuit of higher education— others echoed this. Caron Coates, Wellness Pharmacy, indicated their practice specializes in biomedical processes and custom compounding of drugs. Kerry Mataya who works with individuals 5 - 60 years proposed that an emphasis of this group should be adults with Asperger's with a person-centered approach. She and Joe Carter, Glenwood, handed out a draft chart of programs for adults with ASD, which the group thought would be a good format for others in the room to indicate what interventions are provided in relation to ASDs. Kim Hammock, DMH/MR agreed that appropriate interventions are key to preventing institutionalization.

Rep. Ward provided guidance to the group that they should come away with three broad-based goals, and reminded the group that even though state government proceeds with incremental changes, we need a framework so that when resources become available we have the necessary infrastructure in place to move forward. The end product for the group should be to identify the current status of ASD in the state, what the expansion needs are, and what new programs or provisions are needed. Dr. Joe Morton, Dept. of Education, as well as Commissioner Houston, DMH/MR, plan to provide input to the full task force which should be helpful to the groups.

Existing Programs Discussion:

Other issues brought forward by the group as significant to the state of existing programs involved in autism interventions included: 1.) There are different levels of understanding, knowledge, and capacity relating to program services and eligibility criteria--Medicaid waivers and other payment systems in Alabama are limited in addressing intervention needs across the spectrum; 2.) There are cultural and philosophical differences among organizations providing interventions; 3.) Differences in population demographics and geographical location have an impact on access to intervention and quality of intervention; 4.) There is a lack of opportunity and advocacy for adults on the spectrum; 5.) There should be efforts to plan for the needs of a population that could continue to increase; 6.) Systems change should be guided by research-based practices; 7.) Retention of trained individuals is problematic; 8.) Transitions across systems can be problematic, regardless of age, capability, or family support. 9.) Overall, the state presents a fragmented and spotty approach to autism-- particularly so from young adulthood forward.

Jennifer Muller, from her perspective as ASA director, said all the issues brought forward by the group have merit. She encouraged participants to think of what our end product will be, what we need to gather along the way, and to raise the bar for everyone.

Setting Goals for Next Meeting:

The Chair, prior to adjourning the meeting, said he would send out a questionnaire to guide the group in identifying what is currently being offered in Alabama regarding interventions for autism which should be completed before the next meeting. The minutes of the AL Autism Task Force and the subcommittee minutes will be posted at Rep. Ward's web address, <http://camward.com> and on the ASA website www.autism-alabama.org.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 27th, 10 o'clock a.m., Room 123 State House Bldg., Montgomery, AL.

Submitted by: Alice Widgeon