

11-13-07

Full Task Force-Community Meeting

Meeting called to order at 10:44 by Rep. Ward. This has been a huge educational experience. We are trying to increase awareness; this issue will be here for a long time. We need to make the lives of those with autism better everyday. We have been meeting in Montgomery and are now traveling around the state to get local input and to inform the state of the progress being made by the task force.

Introductions-Would like to thank the local legislators who have been supportive of the effort: State Rep Mac McCutcheon. Rep. McCutcheon represents District 25 which includes Madison City, Capshaw, Monrovia and East Limestone. He thanks those that have traveled here to attend this meeting. He commends Cam's attention to this issue. Public awareness is one of the key issues. He would like to help us educate the educators about the signs and the needs of the autistic child. Cam also acknowledges Sue Schmitz and Parker Griffith who are good friends in the legislature. Please inform the legislators of your interests related to autism. There are those that are serving on the AL Autism Task Force and we thank them.

Committee Reports

Systems of Care-Beverly Marson reporting for Chairman Lee Yount-Beverly is a parent of a 19 year old with autism. She sits on Systems of Care and that group has met on 5 occasions, they have examined the state systems and have looked at other systems that are functioning well. We have looked at workforce issues, in order to have a quality system you must have a quality workforce-there is great need. Training and certification are needed. The committee is looking into recommendations that include more opportunities for training: we are investigating 2 year programs, etc. They have also looked at the idea of developing a center for excellence in the state. This should be based on an objective process. The center should bring all parties together for collaboration. We have discussed a board or oversight council being formed composed of all departments that touch our children during their lifespan. Another topic that has been discussed is staffing and hiring a coordinator that can work with regional centers. We also need a resource person in each major area that can help with I and R. They have also discussed regional centers that can be established in 4-6 areas of the state that would provide services that are not currently available. They have also discussed the need for case management that has expertise in autism. We must monitor the Federal legislation and be able to predict changes that need to be made.

Healthcare-Chairman Bama Hager-Bama is on the Board of ASA and is also a parent. Bama says it is great to see everyone and applauds this town and its great community leaders. Healthcare has a very simple straightforward goal-but it is hard to achieve. Lots of money is involved when it comes to care of these children. They will be recommending coverage for diagnosis and treatment whether that is public or private. This will be ongoing. Diagnosis is pretty straight forward, treatment is a little trickier. We want speech, OT and behavioral therapy. She expects that they will be working into 2008 and beyond.

Intervention Subcommittee- Jennifer Muller reporting for Committee Chair-Tim Ferguson. This committee has a large undertaking and has divided its work into two sub groups- 0-3 years of age and adults. Regional Centers was a theme that is being discussed. Behavioral Needs, In-home services, vocational services. Kerry Mataya is heading up the adult services working group. They are considering residential options, both inhome and out of home and also considering people that do not have mental retardation. Case management, accreditation are also topics that have been discussed. In the 0-3 group-Hanes Swingle is leading the discussion that centers around training for physicians and those that touch our little ones early and on ongoing training and intensive services.

Education-Rep. Ward reports for Chairman Jim Wrye. They have made a lot of progress. They have been going out and visiting with the teachers in the schools. A lot of times public schools get a brunt of the criticisms. They are often trying to find creative ways to help the children and aren't always successful. They want to enable each LEA to hire a special education autism specialist for all teachers in the LEAs. They are looking at 8 pilot sites-that would cost about 525K-there is a lot less growth in the state budget expected this year. They have had an Autism Academy that has functioned-for 181,000 out of the education budget you could offer 16 2 day training courses for teams of 5 that could train lots of teachers. Currently the state offers summer training-we would like to see 210 teachers trained next summer-that is double what we are currently doing. They also want to establish a program that would allow college level students to get a master's degree in autism. The practicum would allow teachers to work in public schools. We would also like a statewide website that has the best and latest info on autism. Finally, they want a state Director of Autism-they have people in each agency that deal with autism but we want 1 person to lead that charge as a director. A rep would be appointed by each agency. We have found that we are overlapping in what they are trying to do. All of these recommendations are with less than 1.1 million dollars. We recognize that that is just for 1 year and we want a long range plan that helps us be in the best situation we can be in 4-5 years.

All of our meetings are public and minutes are posted on the Autism Society of Alabama's website: www.autism-alabama.org

Public Comments

Melody Crane with the **Riley Center**-They do diagnosis and treatment. They are the only nonprofit organization that does diagnostics and treatment in the region. Heather French-see slides presented. They serve a 75 mile radius. They have a multidisciplinary clinic, and ABA clinic with a BCBA-children coming receive 20 hours a week and parents get training to pick up the other 5 hours, they have a Early Education Program that is based on the IPG Model. They have a primary education private school-1-3 grade with certified teachers-the goal is to get the children ready to go into the school system. They have an after school enrichment program and they do school consultations and training-they have contracts with 6 local city and county school systems. All services are

provided to families at below cost. The services are offered for 1/3 of the cost of the National average of 60K. They have dedicated staff and they write for grants, they get personal and business donations. All fundraising efforts are done by the staff-they are a Tri Care provider and they will pay up to 30K per year. See recommendations by Autism Speaks. For more information about Riley Center go to: mcrane@therileycenter.org

The Premier School-also representing Applied Behavioral Concepts. ABC operates inside Premier Preschool. They do this to keep overhead costs down and feel that children learning along side peers retain the information longer and they have already been imbedded inside the school system. They keep ratios to 1:1 or 2:1. This is unlike special ed classrooms where they have more students to the teachers. They never get a ratio get to 1:5. They offer services 8-5, they have an after school program as well. When children get IEPs they imbed them in the preschool programs. Premier preschool offers services to 1st grade. They train teachers at the school and some of their teachers also work for ABC. They also offer parent training services. They travel to help parents set up programs. They are doing project Play and they encourage children to do things that are more child led.

Huntsville Board of Education-Maria Kilgore had to leave. Amy Sledge was also here. Nancy Barnes is an Autism Specialist with the Huntsville City Schools and speaks for this group- they have 3 people doing this-2 full time and 1 part time. She realizes things have changed over the 30 years that she has been in the field. She was in the classroom for many years and realizes what teachers have to deal with. Laura Mallett does 3 evaluations a week. We don't know why there is an increase or why Huntsville is such a hot bed. They have 6 classrooms. They have 1 autism specific class and they hope to move those to a regular preschool class. They also have teachers who work with Day Cares and Head Start. All students that are evaluated need a FAPE. Overloading a teacher doesn't help the teacher or the child. They have 11 specialized classes, they have 1 MS program that specializes in AS. There have been increasing calls from those that are in this age group with AS. All of their classrooms are full. With education in the public schools they have to provide all of the requirements mandated by No Child Left Behind. This is really a crisis. She believes in public ed and she wants to help make this happen. They need education and training for regular ed and special ed teachers. Training is also critical for paraprofessionals. They also need technical assistance and consultation, they need model classrooms. They also need research. There is a lack of funding and a time constraint. Things can't be done overnight and things can happen. She says that parents make a difference and encourages parents to help.

Sparkman High School-they organized a walk last weekend that was very successful and raised money for the Autism Society of Alabama. She is a parent of an 8 year old with autism and the counselor at Sparkman. The National Honor Society decided to take on an autism service program. They had a great walk with a great turnout. The kids raised the money-she would like to thank Lisa Ivey the teacher and all of the Honor Society Members.

Brandy Worthy-**Behavioral Intervention Services**. She thanks Sparkman High School for their volunteer efforts at the April Walk for Autism. She has been in the field since 1995 –it is intriguing and different. She is a BCBA-that has been mentioned in some of the committee reports. At FSU she wanted to bridge the gap between research and implementation. We need University affiliations and partnerships. Within their business they help bridge the gap. They do a lot of parent training and they have gone into their classrooms. They work with children as young as 16 months and as old as 33. All of her employees have degrees. They are able to provide services in other states. They like to go to the homes to provide the services. Many parents are more comfortable with this set up. She asks the teachers what they need to provide the training. They do ABA. They assist with IEPs and curriculum planning. They also do follow up consultations. The only services that are covered by insurance are those provided by a BCBA under TriCare. www.behavior-intervention.com

Teresa White –**North Alabama Autism Society**-she wants to share the personal side to autism. First, their group was founded in 1976. They provide information on ASD, a support group and an AS luncheon. They provide referrals. They like to provide recreational opportunities as well. Their largest event is the teacher appreciation dinner. They are wonderful and do a lot for their children. They would love to see a summer camp in North Alabama. They actually did their own needs assessment –parents wanted respite, camp and insurance coverage. Adult families wanted supported employment, placement for those that can't make it on their own and social skills for adults. Every day she fields calls from families that are just diagnosed and those that have been doing this for awhile. It is important that we address these issues head on. Families no matter where they are geographically the issues are the same-a 33 year old woman who is AS is unable to find employment other than bagging groceries. A mom with a 28 year old son who was concerned about her son's safety trained the local police department. Families in schools locally have not been invited to and IEP after 1 year in school. Families in Madison Counties seeking additional services have been threatened with truancy for pulling their children for additional services.

Making Connections-Debbie Bumbicka-She is thrilled to have everyone here. She has 8 year old son with autism. Last year Whitesburg Baptist Church and ASA sponsored a 2 day conference in June we launched a new support group. They meet monthly on a Saturday afternoon. They are sponsored by ASA, they have a website that has a forum and lists local resources. They have a set up mentoring program. They are also going on monthly family outings. Families can enjoy their outings together. They are working with ASA to obtain a grant to pay for these outings. They have been lucky to get childcare for their meeting provided by local volunteers. Their next meeting is Saturday Nov. 17 and Angela Collier will be speaking. They pooled their information and came up with a local provider resource list. Heather, Julie, Nancy, Brandy-she can't thank them enough. In September we went to Camp ASCCA. After camp one of the local mom's decided that they will have a camp experience for local families-Peggy Stephens is trying to help fundraise for this effort. See camp slides. On a personal note it is hard when you hear about families not having access to needed services. Her son has had great teachers but she has had to fight every year to get the teachers the help they need.

Angela Collier-**Autism Asperger Syndrome Consulting Group(AASCG)**-in 2005 she became involved with Kerry Mataya, they focus on HFA or Asperger Syndrome. She currently works with 45 families. Their services include but are not limited to advocacy, social skills, FBA, behavioral medication programs, evaluations, presentations and training. Service are not covered by insurance. She know that time is limited and it brings great joy to see parents that she has worked for and with in the past. Her clients have HFA and range from 17-33, they have average or above average IQs. The educational system has failed them and it is a sad situation to have these situations where you see great ability but find great difficulty finding and keeping employment. Training for case workers is a significant issue few have had training on meeting the needs of HFA and AS. The case loads in VR limit their ability to meet individual client needs. Case loads are upwards of 400 a piece in Madison County. These people are an untapped employment resource. We need to focus campaigns to target businesses considering these individuals as employees.

Amber Wilson-**Madison County Schools**-we enjoy hearing from other agencies and appreciate collaborations. They currently serve 70 students with ASD, they have 6 currently 2 at each level. They strive to meet the needs of the students-they have an ongoing learning relationship with the Univ. of South FL in Tampa, they come in and train what they call their A team. They also do parent training. They offer a variety of settings. They make every effort to make inclusion work for their students. Teacher ed and training is available throughout the year. They have a PATH program that is a pre-IEP intervention that allows parents come in and develop dreams and goals for their children. This guided meeting has a 3rd party facilitator that guides the team in developing an action plan. awilson@madison.k12.al.us

The meeting was adjourned shortly after 12:30 and guests were invited to stay for lunch that has kindly been provide by Whitesburg Baptist Church. They were also encouraged to stay to provide input for the Community Needs during the Community Forum that will start at 1:00 and end at 2:30.