

Full Task Force  
Mobile, AL 1-16-08

Meeting called to order by Representative Cam Ward at 10:00am. It has been a huge educational experience. We are trying to increase awareness; this issue will be here for a long time. Cam talks about the local officials that are in attendance at today's meeting.

**Introductions**—Jamie Ison R- Mobile

Thank you to everyone for being here today and thank you Senator Brooks for also being in attendance.. She talks about the experience she has had working with those with Autism. Thanks **Dr. Judy Stamp** and **Ken Maganson** and **Ms. Meredith** with the school Board that are attending. She also thanks R- Mobile Jim Barton. She thanks Cam for his efforts in Autism. She recognizes Mabrey Whetstone ALSDE and Steve Shivers Department of Rehabilitation Services. She commends Cam for his attention to this issue.

**Sub- Committee Reports**

Cam speaks about the Task Force's progress to date.

**HealthCare**

Discussion regarding extension of coverage. We have discovered that it is limited and we are working hard to find a way to increase coverage. Discussion of possible Medicaid waiver for Autism. School systems are providing a majority of services, particularly in rural areas.

**Early Intervention**

Thank you to sub-committee group for hard work. Discussion of the AL Autism Support Act. There are different organizations & branches that serve individuals with ASD that are all working toward same goal, but are disjointed. We would like to create a council that deals directly with Autism—one where parents, private providers, and non profits work under one umbrella and under one game plan. If this were done it would give direction for future planning.

Respite Care—When you have a child with ASD you never get a break (therapy, at night, during the day, support services). We need to find a way to provide these services to families so can have a break –because it is healthy for the family.

These subcommittees have the same basic goals. The changes that we want to come about to Autism will not happen fast, but we have to start somewhere. We have to put the structure in place and to make the best use of the resource that we have. We must also be advocates. We must let people know that this is a big issue for the state of AL.

**Presentations by local organizations**

**The Little Learning Tree-**

Jerre Brimer

The Little learning tree is the parent organization of The Learning Tree. He has been planning and working for the last 25 years at the Learning Tree. I has the opportunity to

work with some of the finest young people that come out of school. We can provide them the opportunity and skills to work with Autism. And to watch the young people work with those people with Autism and apply their skills has been very rewarding.

The Little Learning Tree was founded in 2005 in Auburn in conjunction with the Psychology department. Students may be trained in conjunction with the Learning Tree. The models developed contain an inclusive setting—for children with and without ASD. It is important to them to have the equal number. In 2007 the replicated the model in Mobile in conjunction with Mobile Public Schools. Sheila Martin is a true visionary in what she wants to do and developing services on Autism. Also has been working with the local Task force at Dr. Martin's request.

We have developed a plan for those children and it builds on the Little Tree. The expansion serves 30 kids with Autism and 32 typical peers. The Little Tree is based on solid types of therapies. The program is based on Applied Behavior Analysis.

TN, VA, and Utah have had a very thorough review of the methodology of ABA. Department of Defense had a review of services and it also concluded that ABA is what they would pay for.

Some state universities and school systems have contacted the Little Tree about replicating the program.

It has been a partnership with Psychology and Mobile County Schools. JB thanks ALSDE for the grants, and moral support and encouragement.

He speaks of a new collaborative partner for the Little Tree, Volunteers of America Southeast.

Jerre Brimer introduces **Dr. Davis from Volunteers Of America**

Mission is working with people for developmental disabilities. Have worked along side the Learning Tree and have worked with those with Autism. They are very excited about meeting unmet needs in the Community. He understands that early intervention is the key. He commends the Mobile Public schools and the Learning Tree for their work with Autism.

Will provide support for the Little Learning tree in Mobile and in Auburn. They see this as an investment for the community. We want to help build a better quality of life for those affected Autism.

Want to create new and unique partnerships both in private and public sectors. It is a shared responsibility with communities. Thank the Alabama Task force and increasing awareness, dedication, and for coming to Mobile. Thanks for all that you do.

Holly Rodgers, Director of the Little Learning Tree in Mobile, AL

Since inception have made huge gain and currently have 12 students with Autism. Year round school is offered five days a week. The suggested treatment of ABA is 30

hours, but they provide 35 and at least 1 hour a week with the parents in home. The Little Learning Tree serves families for 2 years while parents have them the rest of their lives. State department regulations for preschool standards is basis for all services offered through Little Learning Tree. The Little Learning Tree preschool uses incidental teaching in the classroom and discrete trial training. We do one-on-one training with children with Autism when needed. This program also is a source for data and follows necessary protocols.

#### Alta Pointe—Maggy Possey

Alta Pointe is the former Mobile Mental Health. The names was changed to because more services are offered than just mental health: ABA therapy, speech, etc. Mission is to serve the children. She introduces Rita Brown that is serving the children with MI and MR as a Movement Therapist. Support for the parents is much more than outpatient therapy. Program has been going on for about 5 years.

Many resources are located within the same building: ase management and trainings for the teachers and schools. The in-home team is introduced; it is a 12 week program.

#### Psychiatrist

She works with children with more severe needs. She is working to educate the teachers, parents and counselors and how to educate the other parents.

#### Rita Brown

##### Movement Therapist-Augusta Evans

Registered Movement Therapist. Runs a program called Project Achieve. About 1/3 of those served are on the spectrum. They use sensory integration and Floor Time principals. Suzan is consulted for ABA therapy—she uses sensory integration principals. We find that movement therapy works well with the children. She recommends ABA and talks about the emotional needs of the children. Thanks to everyone (Task force, parents, educators, etc) for their efforts.

#### Suzan Haglion

Has worked very closely with a Behavioral specialist. For 4 years she implemented behavioral programs in home. She also uses the ABA therapy. They use the picture exchange communication systems for those children that are nonverbal. They also help parents set up pictures in their homes. They also refer the children to the case managers at Alta Pointe. The case managers will go into the school and tell what purpose they are there for. The case managers also go into the homes and making sure that the parents are using the programs properly. She also helps the teachers set up these same principals.

#### Kathy Rouse

Therapist for the in-home team. She goes into the homes of the families that have children on the spectrum. Helps those parents understand more about the children and do an assessment and how to work with their child, how to set up their room etc. They work with these parents and children in the school system and at home to personalize their needs. Serves individuals 3-19 years old.

### **South AL Support Group / Autism**

Dana Handmaker

Focusing on Community Education and Advocacy. Dana Handmaker & Cindy Fulford presidents of the South AL Society. They hear most often that they need more services for their children. She feels they have a long way to go but are making strides. She spoke of the ASA and their relationship with them. Also talked about the Walk in Mobile hosted by ASA. She hopes that families will feel more confident in the resources. Her son is going to the Little Learning Tree. She hopes that the Task force will allow for these services. She also spoke of ASA opening a satellite office in Mobile. Thanks to everyone for coming to the meeting and the Staff at the Learning Tree.

### **Mobile County Board of Education**

Judy Strought, District 2 on School Board

School Board serves the entire County. They also believe that every child and parent should be able to dream further. They want to prepare their children for the future. Very pleased in being partners with The Little Learning Tree. She commends Cam for his work and the Task force. She recognizes those from Augusta Evans that traveled with her. They have a facility that has inclusion. Karen Ward is the assistant Superintendent is also with her. Members of the Board of Education are in attendance today. She also thanks the Regional Faculty for being in attendance in today's meeting. She introduces Sheila Martin.

Sheila Martin

She thanks legislators, parents for coming today. She wants to do more for this group of students but for all students. She wants to get the word out that they have only just begun. Her vision is for all kids. It is just a little piece of the ice berg she is tackling. Her goal is to start at 18 months or 16 months because by the time they get into the school system they need to have intervention. She says they need to start intervention earlier than it has been. She said they are working and doing all they can do and will continue to do. She appreciates the Learning Tree and the University of South Alabama group. A lot of the children that they are serving with the Little Learning Tree are the preschool children. She also sees the need to focus on the adult population and they will grow up so she wants to also focus on the Adults.

Dr. Whetstone ALSDE, Spec. Ed.

Thank you to the Task Force. They have been working with the Autism Task force for sometime now. Dr. Morton has been very willing to put into his budget the division for children with Autism.

In order to meet the needs of kids; here is the proposed initiative:

1. A behavioral specialist that is extremely knowledgeable in every school system. Would like it to be in every school. The budget meetings are what will determine what we get funding for.

2. Dr. Morton is very aware of the financial needs he has proposed 8 pilot sites to have a behavioral Specialist and to provide the training for those that will be doing this.
3. Three years ago, Autism Training was provided by the state. Need to get to all teachers that are teachers in AL and provide ongoing professional development. That you reinstate that trainings and propose the 16 trainings around the state. For teams to come and train and professional development that will be ongoing. Increase the summer autism trainings that they have going on right now. It is a week long hands on intensive training. There is a waiting list, but they want to increase their
4. Be aware that we look at what is happening at the pre-services. They have been looking at all of the Special Education programs. They need to develop the in-service centers all around the state such as in Auburn, Tuscaloosa, etc. That are connected to the universities and that students can work directly with children before they leave the university. Pilot sites with in-services.
5. Look at the university training programs if there isn't a closer of connection between Psychology and Sped education department so that they are jointly trained. They don't need to be so departmentalized and active relationship going on between the two.
6. Working to create an Autism Website. There is a central website to provide training and almost a library of trainings and links to agencies. If you are a parent which services are provided and by who. Dr. Morton's budget request for all of these projects is over a million dollars. Once they fund this that they will quickly see the need to expand the needs for those with Autism in their state.

Working hard in AL to have one unified group and that all teachers are concerned about all students. He greatly appreciates the opportunity to talk with every one today.

Cam Ward

Talks about meeting with Governor Riley and talking about how enthusiastic he was about the advocacy and speaking that he was a true advocate. He thanks Commissioner Shivers for coming out today.

Commissioner Shivers-Department of Rehabilitation Services

He talks about the passion that was shared today. They have early intervention that works with children from birth until 3 and then the (adolescent) program. He discusses the problems that children have with Autism such as OT, Speech problems. They have a vocational program that they use with children in High School. They want to focus on children with autism early. He thanks Representative Ward for including them in the Task Force.

Rep. Ward opens for other local providers—

Juliana Fork ---- Therapist in Fairhope

She has a 15 year old son with Asperger's. She is happy to say that the AL seems to be a big improvement from LA. She wanted to share her interest because her child has Asperger's.

Sue Heatter-BCBA Mobile and Baldwin Counties

She has been consulting for about 11 years ago. She works with school systems. They have come a long way in the years. Has been answering questions for many years—gets all kinds of questions.

Stresses importance of Early intervention. She co-founded the program for the Program Reach. Provided training in AL , FL , MS etc. anyone that wanted to come. She also agrees that we need much more training and working with children with Autism. Talks about parents needing help. She works with children, looking for resources, etc.

She says these are the top five:

5. Money

4. Qualified trained professionals

3. Can't we all just get along. We don't have enough resources. We need to band together to reach goals

2. Earlier is better

1. Provide services for the entire family. Need support the family and the community needs to support them.

Reid Bechtel-Behavior Analyst with Sue Heatter

Has been working with Adolescents and adults. As they do all the early intervention they children will grow up it is never too early to get those supports in place. Commends the Department of Rehab Services for their new addition to jobs. Want to use the best services and supports services need to go across the spectrum.

Service Training--- Training teachers, but for individual schools in a more direct support service that needs training as well. Home program are needed but can't find people to work.

(BCBA) are not covered and really want that covered.

**Candy Knickerbocker**----Founded SERFASD

She thanks everyone for being here. She urges anyone that has their influence in budgeting to consider Autism at the top of the list. And she would like to invite those parents to a support group. Providence Hospital 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of every month  
She has found that by getting the parents together they do learn a lot from each other.

Rep Ward opens the floor for parents

Teacher in Mobile County

Her son has Asperger's she thanks her principal to pay for those services and paying for training sessions. She got together with those teachers that teach children with ASD and Asperger's ... Thinks the task force should talk to them about the problem. But as teachers they are caring for them day in and day out. ABA therapists are great but they need the information. They just want more support. She thinks the high functionality autism and Asperger's disorders are invisible disorders. She thinks inclusion is great but they have a bunch of other issues they need to deal with.

Works for Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind and has taught special ed for 22 years.

Rep. Ward

We have visited 28 schools in the state and the first thing that he talks to is the teachers in special ed. Part of the sub committees is the public education. Public schools are not being given enough resources to do what they need to do. He says she raised a very good point.

Karen Murphy-Parent

Daughter goes to The Little Learning Tree, she feels very excited about the progress. Talks about her daughter's progress from UCP and the Little Learning Tree and her daughter will look people in the eye, hug anyone, and has just made wonderful . Wants an assembly for children when they go to the school so that they understand why her child is the way she is. That way they will understand more of what is going on with her child.

Brenda Beverly-Speech Pathology at South AL

She wanted to recognize those that came from the university. University of South AL does have resources and initiatives to teaching, research dedicated to those children on the Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Kelvin and Latonya Sumlin -- Parents

He wants to thank the Little Tree. He just got back from Afghanistan and he is so thankful for the Little Tree and seconds that the Little Tree be expanded. Latonia thanks the Little Tree and discusses the huge progress of her child. She just would like more teachers to have more qualified in Behavioral Training. Some teachers aren't aware of the impact of the sensory issues. They are thankful for the Little Learning tree and Holly Rogers.

Nathan Handmaker—Parent

One thing to add to Sue's list is urgency. The problems here are urgent. Children are approaching Kindergarten. The scale of what they will be faced with as the years go by. He commends Rep. Ward for all that he is doing. He says the Time is now. They need the services and solutions as soon as possible.

Rep Ward agreed- the urgency is understood. Two things it will take are Awareness and money. Both are in short supply in Montgomery. A lot of communities don't have the resources so there is urgency. It is a priority for all of us.

Meeting adorned at 11:52pm.