Here is the Latest Issue of the AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional Newsletter!

This issue highlights the contributions and accomplishments of some of our SECP SIG members. As you will read, our members are doing great work in physical health, family supports, medical practitioners, and policy. We hope this newsletter is a useful resource in learning about colleagues with whom you could collaborate.

We invite you to get involved in the many SECP activities. Sign up for the SECP SIG online when you join or renew your AAIDD membership or contact Jason Epstein jepstein@aaidd.org for more information. We look forward to hearing from you!

Congratulations to our new SECP SIG Co-chair!

Kim W. Fisher, PhD was voted in as the new co-chair of the SECP SIG. She replaces Kelly Bohlander, whose term has ended. Thanks, Kelly for all of your hard work! Kim recently served as the secretary of the SECP SIG. We welcome Kim’s leadership, organizational skills, and initiative!
In the third piece related to the IDD terminology committee, Thompson, et al. (2009) frame supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) within Wile’s (1996) Model of Human Performance Technology (HPT) where, among other domains, institutional systems, environments, and an individual’s skills and abilities work in concert, to support human performance. This framework represents the diversity of supports needed by individuals with IDD to fully participate in their communities, acknowledges that support needs should be individualized, and recognizes that support delivery also must be individualized. I am happy to report that this professional diversity is reflected in the Student and Early Career Professionals special interest group (SECP) through our members’ work. In this piece, I highlight the diverse work of four of our members (presented in alphabetical order): Kelly Bohlander, Megan Burke, Kathy Carter, and Shelley Watson. Their work reflects a supports-based perspective and addresses key institutional, community, and individual support needs to increase community participation for individuals with IDD.

Addressing institutional support needs, her work on policy and project management has lead Kelly Bohlander, MSW, MPA, to start Catalyst Consulting, a company that provides project management, stakeholder support, and policy analysis services. She recently became the local facilitator for the North Carolina Stakeholder Engagement Group (NC SEG), an initiative of the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services. This group works to ensure that policy decisions affecting people with disabilities have direct input from self-advocates and their families. Kelly can be reached at kelly@askcatalyst.org.

In her work on physical health, Kathy Carter RD, Ph.D., an Assistant Professor at the University of Louisville, focuses on how physical activity and nutrition improves the health and independence of individuals with IDD. Most recently, her work with young adults has focused on (a) modifying activities so that exercise opportunities are inclusive and (b) understanding the best teaching methods when teaching movement to individuals with IDD. Kathy also teaches graduate courses in exercise physiology, nutrition, and sports performance at the University of Louisville. Kathy can be reached at kathleen.carter@louisville.edu.

Recognizing the knowledge/skills families need in supporting family members with IDD to lead independent lives, Meghan Burke, Ph.D., an Assistant Professor of special education at the University of Illinois, has done extensive work examining how parents and siblings navigate service delivery systems and advocate for appropriate supports. With the support of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, she developed the Volunteer Advocacy Project (VAP)--a 40-hour training for parents to learn how to advocate for special education services. The VAP has since been replicated in Chicago. With colleagues from Vanderbilt, she is now adapting the VAP for parents of young adults with autism to navigate the adult service system. Meghan can be reached at meghanbm@illinois.edu.
Recognizing the need for educating health service providers, Shelley Watson, Ph.D., an Associate Professor at Laurentian University, is beginning a research project on medical practitioners' knowledge around developmental disabilities and dual diagnosis, a skill/knowledge desperately needed by medical practitioners. Shelley, who works with families of individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder or autism spectrum disorder, is also the Psychology Department Coordinator in the Interdisciplinary Health Master's Program at Laurentian University. Shelley can be reached at swatson@laurentian.ca.

Together, the work of these members represent the “universe of resources and strategies” (Thompson et al., 2009, p. 139) professionals need when working with individuals with IDD and their families. It is reflected not only in our supports-based perspectives but also in how we recognize and value the multi-faceted lives individuals with IDD live and the diverse perspectives they have. It is with these perspectives, values, and activities that human functioning in inclusive communities can be realized.

References
Community-based intellectual/developmental disability (IDD) agencies provide services and supports to people with IDD offering these individuals the opportunity to participate in their community and engage in positive health behaviors. However, little is known about the factors involved in sustaining community-based health initiatives (CBHI) among IDD agencies. For this reason, the current study explored the facilitators and barriers of CBHI for individuals aging with IDD living in group homes managed by IDD community-based agencies. The study consisted of 70 participants, including 35 adult clients aging with IDD and 35 key stakeholders (i.e., directors, managers and direct support staff) from two non-profit IDD agencies located in Chicago. Nineteen key stakeholder interviews were conducted to explore system-level facilitators and barriers to the sustainability of CBHI within their agency. Six group homes took part in participant observations, photovoice, and nominal group techniques to gain a better understanding of how clients with IDD experience barriers and facilitators to being healthy and active while aging in their home and community. A town hall meeting was held to disseminate research findings and participants developed short-term action plans on how to improve health and community participation within their group homes and communities.

Preliminarily findings suggest that IDD agencies understand the importance of health and community participation for clients and support such initiatives; however, agencies lack policies and resources (e.g., financial, training, knowledge) to sustain CBHI for their clients aging with IDD. Additionally, agencies lack evaluation methods and support to provide appropriate feedback to staff and managers on how well they are implementing and sustaining CBHI with clients aging with IDD.

Additionally, clients with IDD identified facilitators to being healthy in their homes and communities as: being active in their home, such as doing house chores or having access to exercise equipment; eating healthy; helpful support staff; and being engaged in their community, such as going for walks after dinner, going to the store, and playing sports in the park. Conversely, barriers included balance issues; difficulty chewing food due to teeth loss; being scared of dogs; relationship issues with housemates; watching too much television; diet restrictions and eating too much junk food; lack of transportation; and limited access to community participation, such as lack of transportation, personal finances, and not knowing what community activities are available.

This study provides a systemic understanding of factors involved with sustaining CBHI for individuals aging with IDD living in group home settings. The results of the study may help guide the development of evidence-based CBHI to take into consideration system-level facilitators and barriers, which may help ensure long-term implementation. Gaining a better understanding of the facilitators and barriers involved in sustaining CBHI that are being implemented by community-based IDD agencies is important to ensure that individuals aging with IDD may experience positive physical, psychological, and social health outcomes as they age, thus potentially decreasing their risk of institutionalization due to poor health. Additionally, this study contributes to the knowledge base of how knowledge translation can be used within IDD research as well as identifying methods that can increase the amount of participation and engagement of people with IDD within the research process.
Community Conversations: Building Networks and Expanding Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

By Carly Blustein

In the summer and fall of 2013, the TennesseeWorks Partnership, a collaboration between Vanderbilt University and more than 30 state agencies and disability organizations, worked with six regions throughout the state to host a series of community conversation events to engage a broad cross-section of Tennessee communities in generating creative solutions for improving employment outcomes that reflect local priorities and possibilities. Community conversations are an asset-based approach for informing and launching efforts to expand inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities. These two-hour events were designed to gather diverse members of a community to generate both ordinary and creative solutions to a key challenge facing their community: the limited access people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have to do real work for real pay.

Attendees participated in a series of “coffee-house-style” conversations at small tables during which they shared their best ideas related to two questions:

1. What can we do as a community to increase meaningful employment opportunities for people with intellectual disability?
2. How might we work together in compelling ways to make these ideas happen here in this community?

Events were held in six cities reflecting the geographic diversity of Tennessee. More than 400 community members participated in these six events (range, 39 to 94 per event). Participants included individuals with disabilities (8%), family members of people with disabilities (21%), educators (19%), employers (12%), disability agencies (12%), community group representatives (11%), civic leaders (7%), faith community leaders (3%), and others (8%; e.g., media, friends or neighbors of people with disabilities).

We analyzed multiple sources of data, including end-of-conversation questionnaires, six-week follow-up surveys, and notes taken at individual tables during all discussions. Below are key findings from these events:

- Slightly more than one-third of attendees (37%) agreed that people in their community were generally receptive to employing people with disabilities.
- Only about one-third of attendees (35%) felt strong partnerships between employers, community agencies, and families currently existed.
- Nearly three-quarters of attendees (75%) agreed that their community currently had the capacity to support people with disabilities in meaningful jobs.
- Almost all attendees (96%) felt members of their community needed help learning how to support people with disabilities in meaningful jobs.
- Almost all attendees (97%) agreed that follow-up events or actions on this issue were needed in their community.
- Analyses of the more than 1,300 ideas generated clustered around the following six areas of critical need. A full report of the strategies for each of these areas will be released this fall:
  - Enhancing inclusive workplaces: Assist employers who have already hired people with disabilities to better support these employees in the workplace by providing employers information, training, and mentorship opportunities.
Community Conversations: Building Networks and Expanding Employment Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

(cont.)

- **Strengthening school and transition services.** Enhance the school-to-work transition process through professional development, work-based experiences for students, and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as agencies and disability organizations.

- **Equipping people with disabilities to be competitive applicants.** Finding effective ways to better prepare individuals with disabilities for employment by teaching interpersonal skills, vocational skills, and strategies for networking in the community.

- **Developing new employment opportunities.** Expanding integrated employment opportunities in communities by connecting stakeholders through a formalized employment network or an online portal, developing jobs related to strengths and abilities of potential applicants, and recruiting and training new employers.

- **Undertaking community-wide efforts.** Spurring local involvement beyond the disability community to raise expectations and improve employment opportunities by sharing practical resources, new ideas, and success stories.

- **Supporting families in transition.** Increasing family participation through education, advocacy efforts, and collaboration with community programs, agencies, and other supports.

References

Highlights from 2014 Conference

By: Haleigh Scott

The 138th annual AAIDD meeting in Orlando, Florida focused on Embracing Complexity through Inclusion, Participation, and Citizenship. Conference goers enjoyed a variety of conference activities such as an interactive poster session, a variety of plenary and concurrent sessions, workshops, and exhibitions by disability-related services and research groups from around the country. The entertainment options for this conference were also extraordinary: the conference hotel was located across the street from Downtown Disney and a short drive away from Disney World, Universal Studios, Florida’s sunny beaches, and many of the other recreational activities Orlando has to offer.

Keynote speakers, in line with this year’s conference theme, presented on promoting supported decision making for individuals with developmental disabilities, including a moving speech made by a self-advocate describing the barriers she has had to overcome to make her own choices about her life, which received a standing ovation. Several sessions presented on promoting quality of life for individuals and families affected by disability. In celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS), several of its authors, including new AAIDD president-elect Jim Thompson, presented newest developments in the use and psychometric properties of the SIS.

As a graduate student, I am most excited to attend the poster session. The poster session is always a popular and well attended event, and this year was no different. The poster session is a great place for researchers at every career level to present new data, literature reviews, and master or dissertation projects, and to connect with other students and professionals to share ideas and to stay on the cutting edge of emerging research. This year, 136 research posters were presented on a wide range of interests such as professional development, health, autism, and family issues. A range of posters on health presented research on advancements in clinical care, understanding how race and disability may interact, women specific health issues, gerontology, and end-of-life planning. There were over ten posters addressing issues related to autism. Highlights include innovative interventions to address symptoms of autism such as parent-driven therapy and social skills interventions based in the creative arts. Posters on the impact of family experiences with IDD included topics of family stress and their access to services and supports. Several posters on professional development were presented by the Student and Early Career Professional SIG detailing the activities of the group and providing recommendations for other groups looking to grow their membership. A poster also presented information on the AAIDD delegation’s recent information gathering trip to Norway.

Though the 2014 conference seems barely passed, it is already time to begin planning for the next conference! Next year’s conference in Louisville, Kentucky (June 1-4, 2015) is sure to bring another batch of innovative and interesting presentations. Hope to see you there!
Thanks to all of SECP Leaders!!

The work of the Student and Early Career Professionals SIG is done by a dedicated group of volunteer leaders. Without this group, the SECP SIG would not be as dynamic, fun, and beneficial for its members. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our leaders! If you would like to volunteer to help continue the success of the SECP SIG, please contact one of the leaders below. We would benefit from your involvement!

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Not yet an AAIDD member.... Join Today!

AAIDD offers a number of membership options with a variety of benefits depending on the level you choose. Below we will highlight three types of membership that may be affordable for students and early career professionals.

AAIDD offers an International Electronic membership for members residing outside of the U.S. or Canada for $50, which offers electronic access to both *AJIDD* and *IDD* journals. Members at this level cannot hold office or vote in AAIDD elections.

AAIDD offers a Basic membership for $75, which offers electronic access to *AJIDD* or *IDD* journals. Basic members are eligible to hold office and vote in AAIDD elections.

AAIDD also offers a Classic membership for $125, which offers electronic access to both *AJIDD* and *IDD* journals. Classic members are eligible to hold office and vote in AAIDD elections.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, members at all three levels have access to members-only web forums, delivery of electronic newsletters, and are entitled to member discounts for meeting registration, book store purchases, and job postings.

For more information on the various membership categories and to join AAIDD visit: [http://www.aaidd.org/content_120.cfm](http://www.aaidd.org/content_120.cfm)

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About SECP SIG

The goal of the AAIDD Student and Early Career Professionals Special Interest Group (SECP SIG) is to develop and implement strategies that foster the involvement and representation of students, recent graduates, and professionals in the early stages of their careers within AAIDD. The SIG has a number of initiatives and meets via teleconference once per month to provide updates on committee initiatives and to share ideas. We are always interested in including more students and new members in our activities. Please contact Sarah Hall at sahall@ashland.edu or Kim Fisher at kimwfisher@asu.edu if you would like to learn more about becoming involved in this active committee.

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