



June 1, 2015

AAIDD Membership,

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to serve as the president of the Association over the past year. As I prepare for the annual meeting it is a time of reflection and I wanted to share with you some important accomplishments of the association and issues that our association and the field will face in the coming years.

I would first like to thank my fellow AAIDD Board members for their contributions and the passion they bring to AAIDD. I promise you that this group of leaders has worked hard to ensure the future and relevance of this association. I have also felt privileged to work in partnership with AAIDD's Executive Director/CEO Maggie Nygren who works tirelessly to represent AAIDD in key partnerships, ensures that the organization is evolving multiple revenue streams, and leads this organization into the future. The association's staff is incredible. They are a group of talented, resourceful and dedicated individuals and we are so fortunate to have their collective energy in carrying out the mission of AAIDD,

“to promote progressive policies, sound research, effective practices, and universal human rights for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.”

It is a time of change in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Significant policies have been passed in the U.S. at the federal level that are changing the landscape. The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the new Home and Community Based Services regulations on community living and the Affordable Care Act are just a few examples of significant policy changes that will have tremendous effect of practices, policies and research, and ultimately on the lives of people with IDD.

You likely saw a recent article in the *Atlantic* magazine that suggested people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) might be better off living in institutional segregated communities. Not a week goes by that I do not hear from someone in a state indicating that they are fighting proposed legislation or activities that are attempting to promote the building of segregated institutional facilities and programs for people with disabilities. I challenge you to think about the efforts this organization has taken over the past several decades to promote community participation for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The proponents of such segregated programs urge their development due to staffing problems (turnover, vacancy, competence) and waiting lists. The solution to waiting lists, staffing challenges, and meeting the needs and desires of the increased number of people with ASD is NOT to build big places and segregate people, it is to strengthen our communities, implement the evidence based

Knowledge | Support | Empowerment

solutions we know will improve workforce challenges, invest more community support, and let people create their own unique lives. I wish the *Atlantic* magazine and other proponents of such programs had reviewed the research on community vs congregated care outcomes, much of which has been published in AAIDD journals. It's clear we will find solutions and people will have better lives in the community with supports in place. Supports include staff, family, friends, and community members with the right attitudes and the knowledge and skill to provide support.

In my Presidential address last year I urged you to consider that we are on the verge of a 21st century deinstitutionalization movement. We need to rid our existing community based services and supports of institutional bias and attitudes, not promote the evolution of new ones. I urge our Association to take a strong stance on the important issues of community living and the assurance of a stable and competent workforce to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have lives of their choosing in communities of their choosing.

I know that as practitioners, providers, researchers, allies and advocates you are doing everything you can each and every day to make a difference in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The systems in which you work are incredibly complex and ever changing. We must not let up in our advocacy and the importance of working side by side with citizens with intellectual disability to ensure that they have equal opportunities for community life.

I have appreciated the opportunity to serve AAIDD in the role of Board President and I am confident that the organization is vibrant, stable and strong. I look forward to the many ways in which I will be able to continue to serve AAIDD in the coming years and I urge you to become involved in the association through leadership roles as well.

With Deepest Gratitude and Respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy S. Hewitt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Amy Hewitt, PhD, FAAIDD
President, AAIDD Board of Directors

Knowledge | Support | Empowerment