

# COMMUNITY NOW!

*... promoting inclusive communities for all people marginalized because of a disability*

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## MISSION

Community Now! is a statewide nonprofit organization passionately committed to promoting inclusive communities for all Texans often marginalized because of a disability.

## WE BELIEVE...

Our loved ones with disabilities should have the option to live in their communities and not languish on long waiting lists for services or forced to live in a dangerous, dehumanizing segregated institution.

The services for our citizens with disabilities must be nothing short of exceptional and that those responsible for providing these services must be held accountable.

Public policy and tax dollars must be aligned to support Texans with disabilities who want to live in smaller, more cost efficient settings in their communities and no longer support the waste and abuse of a failed institutional system.

## *From the President's pen...*

As we approach the New Year, we recognize how fast time flies. We also recognize the amount of work ahead of us. The last legislative session was challenging, and we don't expect the 83<sup>rd</sup> legislative session to be any easier. To make a difference we must organize now. Our message is still the same, it has not changed. Close/consolidate SSLCs and redirect funding into community-based services.

Most families who have a child with a disability, regardless of age, do not want them to live in an institution. This is evident as the number of people waiting on a Medicaid Waiver "interest list" continues to grow while the resident population in Texas' institutions declines.

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, Community Now! held our first fundraiser. To everyone who came out and supported the event – the bands that played great music, our sponsors, donors, and participants - - THANK YOU! If you missed the event, it is not too late to make a donation. A donation of any kind or size is appreciated. As a non-profit, we rely on volunteers and donors to strengthen the work of the agency. With your support we can make a difference.

The holiday season in full swing, reminding us to count our blessings. Having Morgan with us made our family Thanksgiving celebration. We all had a great time! It also reminded me of how thankful I am that he lives in the community. Living in the community has afforded Morgan the ability to frequently spend time with immediate and extended family; something we were unable to do when he was a resident at the Austin State School (now known as the Austin State Supported Living Center).

May your Holidays be a joyful celebration for your family and the memories created celebrated over a lifetime.

Sincerely,  
*Michelle Dooley*

*Independence from waiting. Freedom from institutions.*

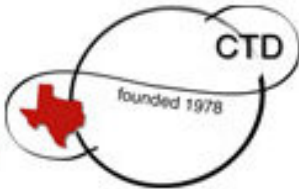
# THANK YOU!

To all event sponsors and donors of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Community Now! fundraiser, "Break the Cycle Jam".



## CTD

Coalition of Texans with Disabilities



# Central Market



### Silent Auction Donors

Jeanne Cecil, Acupuncture Medical and Research Centre, Inc. and the Montgomery Street Antique Mall vendors: Betty Hulse ▪ Wes Puckett ▪ Angela Inman ▪ Joe Briseno ▪ Cynthia Coop ▪ Bruce Mc Curley ▪ Chris Sheidler ▪ Judy Phillips ▪ Gwen Rae ▪ Susan Thompson & Sarah Mc Drayer



## *A Time for Change*

### **IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH A DISABILITY**

#### **Why is change needed?**

To understand why change is needed, it is important to examine the history and purpose of the self-advocacy movement and our current service delivery systems (education, community, and long term care).

The term “self-advocacy” has been around a long time now. It can be traced back to the 1960s when adults living with a disability label began speaking out about the importance of taking an active role in planning their lives and the programs that support them.

Historically, individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities have been some of the most powerless members of society. They often live in separate segregated settings with little or no control over their environment; limiting interactions to those who are paid to be in their lives. This leaves them extremely vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Expectations are lowered due to social and physical isolation, as well as human barriers including perception.

Self-advocacy seeks to reduce the isolation of individuals who have a disability and provides a person with the tools and experience to take greater control over his or her own life. And although a person with a disability may call upon the support of others, the individual is entitled to be in control of their own destiny, making life decisions without undue influence and/or control by others.

The concept of Self-advocacy, once used more with adults, has been recognized as a skill that should be encouraged in children and teens. Recognizing the need to address self-advocacy through the life span, we must acknowledge a family’s involvement as an essential ingredient to success and examine the role professional people may play in the decision making process.

Too often, professionals paint a bleak picture of possibilities based on personal biases, expectations, life experiences and program barriers. It’s this pessimism that limits the dreams and aspirations of individuals who have a disability and their families.

There is an inevitable tension between the emergence of autonomy and independence on the part of any individual and the needs of his or her family for safety and protection; a tension often heightened by the presence of a disability. However, professionals and others are often too quick to assume that legitimate family concerns about such issues are the primary barrier to self-determination and fail to examine the role they play in maintaining a dependency creating system. If, from the time the child entered early childhood, through adolescence and young adulthood, parents were provided an equal role in making decisions and solving problems that relate to educational planning and implementation, it is likely they would, in turn, be more likely to support their sons or daughters emerging autonomy. Similarly, if students and adults who have a disability had an equal voice in decisions that impact their lives, families might see the value in promoting self-advocacy.

Without a shift in the way we currently provide services, no philosophy can truly support individuals who have a disability, even in the earliest of years in living self-determined lives.

#### **What does systems reform require?**

Systems reform requires those who provide and/or fund services to make certain changes in both the way they think about individuals who have a disability and the way services are provided.

Systems must shift from:

- A reliance on institutions and segregated settings to more cost effective, community-based services provided in natural settings.
- Perceiving individuals living with a disability label as having limitations that prevent them from participating in life, school and community to recognizing each person as an individual capable of contributing to their community in their own way.
- Perceiving individuals who have a disability as incapable of living independent lives to recognizing we are *all* successful because of independent relationships.
- Providing systems controlled services based on disability labels or programs to supporting individualized and person directed services. This includes utilizing person centered/directed planning as a discovery process while encouraging dreaming and visioning removing biases and perceived barriers in goal setting.
- Systemic and agency control of financial resources to individual control.
- Control to support and empowerment.
- From can't to can. Remembering what Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once said, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

In addition to the above shift, families must be recognized as valued and contributing members in planning processes, services provided by trained personnel must be accessible, and a system of monitoring and accountability must be in place and enforced.

### **Where does reform start?**

Reform starts at the earliest level of the service delivery system – our public school systems. To reform one system (education) without reforming the other (long-term care) limits the overall benefits of reform. Reform at any level should be based on the following values:

- Respect – Acknowledges an individual's value as a person while recognizing his or her strengths and abilities and granting them the same considerations we each desire. As expressed in the U.S Developmental Disabilities Act, "**Disability is a natural part of the human experience** that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to live independently, to exert control and choice over their own lives, and to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of United State society."
- Choice – The freedom for an individual, with chosen support, to make decisions that affect his or her life; to have dreams and to pursue a course of action that will make those dreams a reality, limited only in ways a person without a disability is limited. Christopher Morley reminds us of the importance choice plays in a person's life in his quote: "There is only one success – to live your own way."
- Ownership – Implies more than decision making. It is being in control of ones life and resources;

accepting responsibility for his or her actions. While most individuals will be supported in the decision making process by a circle of support, ownership gives the person the final authority.

- Support – Is vital in helping a person who has a disability live a self-determined life. Most individuals will have some sort of support network they can turn to when making important decisions in their life; family, friends, professionals, and others. This should be no different for a person who has a disability.
- Opportunity – To experience all aspects of life, including but not limited to, home, school, places of worship, social opportunities, relationships, etc; having the freedom to succeed and fail with grace, and to learn from one's mistakes. Part of the process of growing into adulthood, and to continue growing as an adult, is the ability to take risks. As Helen Keller once said, "Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing."

Systems reform that embraces the above values and shift in thinking will increase the ability of individuals who have a disability to live a life of purpose and meaning.

### **What can you do?**

Get involved. If not now, when? If not you, who? Remember, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

- It has been said that the first step toward change is through awareness.

Visit the Community Now! website: [www.communitynowfreedom.org](http://www.communitynowfreedom.org). Here you will find information on:

- Medicaid Waiver programs
- The institutional bias in Texas
- Department of Justice monitoring reports
- Abuse and neglect status reports and *more...*

If you are involved with a parent or self-advocate group, we would welcome an invitation to visit with your group.

- Organize –Grassroots advocacy is needed. Community Now! has active coalitions in the following areas – Austin, Bryan, College Station, Corpus Christi, and the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Don't see a coalition in your area, contact us and we can help you get one started.
- Call and/or visit your legislator. Take advantage of their time in the District. Share your story! Don't know who represents you, visit: <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/>.
- Join Community Now! on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/communitynowfreedom> or through our Yahoo Group at: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Community\\_Now/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Community_Now/).
- Make a donation. Community Now! relies on individual donations to continue our work.

For more information or to get involved, please contact Joe Tate by phone (830) 305-0613 or through email at: [tate392@gmail.com](mailto:tate392@gmail.com). Together we are stronger!

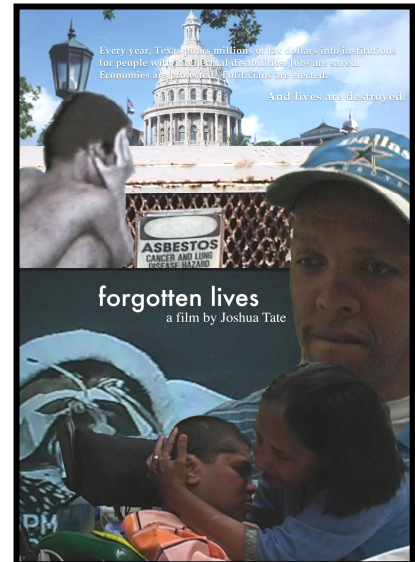
Help individuals who have a disability live a meaningful life. **Take action!**  
Stand up for long-term care systems reform.



Community Now!  
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### **Forgotten Lives, A film by Joshua Tate**

Forgotten Lives is a 44 minute award winning film that chronicles the horror and abuse perpetrated against Texas' most vulnerable citizens inside state institutions and offers hope for a future of freedom and dignity in the community.



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## **PEACE**

*PEACE will come when people live in friendship, side by side, and cherish understanding more than hatred, greed and pride.*

*PEACE will come when people see all people as the same, and no one has to live in fear, in ignorance, or shame.*

*PEACE will come when people who are needy can reach out for shelter, food, or love, and no one has to do without.*

*PEACE will come when people learn to listen and to care about the rights and dignity of people everywhere.*

*PEACE will come when love and trust and kindness know rebirth, and on that day all people will rejoice in peace on earth.*

*- Unknown*