

NASDDDS Teleconference Series

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1 p.m.

“Supporting People to Live the Life They Choose – Their Entire Life!”

By

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Good afternoon. My name is Mike Harrell and I bring you greetings from the Resource Center on Aging with Developmental Disabilities.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for having this opportunity to participate in today’s teleconference series. And if I sound somewhat nervous, it is probably because the obvious has occurred. However, nonetheless I’ll do my best.

I am pleased to report that this resource center is the only resource center of its kind in Louisiana, the state referred to as “The Sportsman’s Paradise.” As you may already know Louisiana is also known for hosting the world’s largest party – “Mardi Gras”!!!

Our state leaders and policy makers have recognized that people are living longer. The size of the baby boom generation – those of us born between 1946 and 1964 – is growing. According to a 2004 report printed in *State of the States in Developmental Disabilities*, our population of baby boomers will reach age 65 in 2011 – that’s just 7 seven from now. Included in this generalization is a group of people we normally overlook – people with developmental disabilities.

The numbers are out there – telling us that there are more than a half million adults age 60 years and older with developmental disabilities. Their numbers will more than double by the year 2030. The bottom line is this: people with developmental disabilities are living longer. Louisiana has decided it's time to get busy.

On Monday, January 12, 2004, our state made history by installing its first female governor – the Honorable Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, and by opening the doors to its first inclusive Resource Center on Aging with Developmental Disabilities. I was named director.

The center is being operated by the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals through the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities. We are currently located at Columbia Developmental Center – a facility in north Louisiana which has a longstanding tradition of supporting a majority of people aging with developmental disabilities. This is a great opportunity for our state and we are excited!

Our primary customers are:

1. Persons aging with developmental disabilities
2. Family members of persons aging with developmental disabilities
3. All providers
4. Practitioners in our communities such as physicians, gerontologists, nurses, physical, occupational, and speech therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, ICF/MR administrators, nursing home administrators, direct support professionals, and social workers.
5. University students

The mission of our center is simple: “to support people to live the life they choose – for their entire life!”

Our primary activities include:

1. To develop and provide capacity building through training events, educational materials, consultations, technical assistant and limited direct services. For instance, on June 2-3, 2004, after only being operational for five months, we were able to host our first conference. Our goal was 60 folks and we ended up with more than 140. The conference’s focus was “Age-associated issues facing persons aging with developmental disabilities.” Our keynote speaker was Dr. Janicki, who spent the day sharing valuable information regarding dementia and aging among people with developmental disabilities. The conference concluded with presentations from Dr. Paula Click-Fenter, associate professor of physical therapy at LSU Health Sciences Center in Shreveport and Dr. William Gouvier, professor of Neuropsychology at LSU Health Sciences Center in Baton Rouge. In July, I presented papers during the annual Louisiana State Conference for AAMR. Our next workshop is slated for two (2) weeks from today. It will concentrate on insight into aging and autism spectrum disorder and will be held in central Louisiana. Dr. Mark Yeager will be our keynote speaker. In January 2005, we will host a north Louisiana workshop on elderly abuse. It will be an opportunity for family members and other caregivers to participate in a positive presentation on preventing abuse and neglect. That workshop will be presented by Dr. Dan Sheridan, a forensics nurse. In the spring 2005, we will conduct a two- or three-day conference on topics related to end-of-life issues.

2. To build partnerships and collaborative relationships with providers, community professional, families, other state agencies, educational institutions, professional organizations, and other stakeholders to efficiently target gaps and improve multiple efforts. These partnerships and relationships were launched with the selection of members to the center's Advisory Board. For instance, two of its members are persons aging with developmental disabilities, a family member of a person aging with developmental disabilities, a professor of gerontology from the University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM), a Registered Nurse specializing in hospice care, social workers professionals supporting aging populations, a direct support professional, the director of a Council on Aging office, a nurse practitioner, and a professor of Occupational Therapy. We are providing training and presentations to provider agencies supporting people aging with developmental disabilities. We are attempting to cover all parts of Louisiana, making people aware of the center. Our web site is up and running, giving up to date information on upcoming workshops and conferences in Louisiana related to aging. We have partnered with the Louisiana Chapter of DDNA (Developmental Disabilities Nurses' Association) to conduct workshops and conferences for the purpose of providing intellectual capital to all stakeholders. On the education side of the coin, we have partnered with my alma mater - The University of Louisiana at Monroe – to design and develop a three-credit hour courses pertaining to direct support professionals and family members on providing quality supports to persons aging with developmental disabilities. Student rotations are planned for this year with students representing

the following disciplines: gerontology, nursing, occupational therapy, social work, and psychology. We feel there is such a strong need to develop future professionals by giving them the opportunity to meet aging people with developmental disabilities.

3. Accomplish and promote research and publication in regards to persons aging. We have a contract with ULM to conduct a research project to identify who are these persons aging with developmental disabilities, where do they live – at home, or with family, or in an institution, what concerns and issues are facing these persons, and how can we improve on providing better supports and services.

4. Future partnerships will be with the following:

1. The Louisiana Geriatric Society
2. The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs
3. The Governor's Office of Elderly Affairs
4. The National Family Caregivers Support Program
5. LSU Human Development Center

It has been a busy nine months for me and my administrative support staff. We have a lot of work to do. The energy and enthusiasm is there. We excited as we continue to support people to live the life they choose – for their entire life.