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Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) Annual Report Fall 2003- Summer 2004

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I. Advocacy: Community Services, the ADA and more

2004 is an interim year, when the Legislature does not meet in regular session. Yet advocacy was our principal work and CTD was deeply involved in two major issues with huge influence on Texans with disabilities.

Major Advocacy Project: Community Cuts Restored: Advocacy Success Reinstates Attendant Care for 100,000 Texans

The state budget: 100,867 Texans of all ages with disabilities receiving services under the Primary Home Care and Community Attendant programs were scheduled to have their community attendant care hours cut by 15% in September 2003 and an additional 15% - 35% in September 2004. Not proposed cuts, not considered cuts, but planned and scheduled cuts.

CTD has been actively working on restoring the cuts for over a year. CTD had been instrumental in restoring the cuts scheduled for September 2003, including a private advocacy meeting with Governor Rick Perry. With cuts still scheduled for September 2004, CTD received numerous calls from consumers who would have been affected, all in great distress, some in panic. Several callers said they received the minimum hours of service to remain in their homes as it is, and a cut would force them into a nursing facility.

A diverse group of organizations for people who are elderly or have disabilities joined together in an initiative called Save Our Services, or S.O.S. At a May 12 meeting, DHS Commissioner Jim Hine told S.O.S. representatives the State had a plan to transfer \$140 million to restore the cuts, yet approvals had not been obtained. On May 27, representatives from CTD, AARP, ADAPT and Advocacy Incorporated spoke at a Capitol press conference, calling on state leaders for rapid approval of the plan. One day later, we received confirmation of **full restoration of the scheduled cuts.**

Major Advocacy Project: Progress on Protecting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

In his official capacity as the state's top lawyer, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott is fighting for state immunity from the civil rights protections of the ADA. He is taking the position that Texas has sovereign immunity from the ADA and is therefore allowed to commit acts of discrimination based on a person's disability. CTD is at the forefront of the battle.

Some of our actions on this critical issue:

- January 9 press conference at the Texas Supreme Court building in Austin: advocates for civil rights, older Americans and people with disabilities gathered to urge Abbott and Governor Perry to support the federal ADA. ADAPT, the ARC of Texas and CTD were joined by civil rights attorneys to denounce Abbott's position.
- Presented our position to the State Bar of Texas.
- Filed an amicus brief in *Miller v. Texas Tech* plus co-signed several other briefs in ADA cases.
- Coordinated an email blast to the Governor's Office.
- Gave media interviews.
- Proposed and drafted improved legislation to remove state immunity.
- Met with the offices of the Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker of the House and Attorney General.
- Gained the support of the Governor for state legislation to protect the ADA.
- Working with VOLAR advocates Eric Reed and Luis Chew, gained the support of the Attorney General for state legislation to protect the ADA.

Restoration of Assistive Technology to Far West and Southeast Texas: The state discontinued outreach on the Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Project (STAP) to two regions of Texas. CTD enlisted the help of a state senator and state representative to get this important service restored.

Reorganization of health and human services in Texas: CTD has supplied public comment on several aspects of the reorganization, most recently targeting the expansion of Star-Plus managed care.

Housing for people leaving nursing homes

CTD advocated for solutions to issues related to housing vouchers targeted to the Olmstead population.

Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)

CTD is promoting self-employment as a vocational rehabilitation strategy.

II. Strengthening the Foundation of CTD Public Policy Work

CTD worked on strategies to strengthen the framework of disability advocacy. The strategies were not issue-specific, but rather designed to improve resources for any ongoing policy issues.

Political Leaders to CTD: CTD's Sept 2003 Convention drew Comptroller Strayhorn, Congressperson Sheila Jackson Lee and National Council on Disability Chair Lex Frieden.

Livable Communities: A collaboration between advocates for people with disabilities and older Americans: This multi-level cooperation of CTD and AARP-Texas has great promise. In its first year, CTD technical assistance has secured participation of the influential 2-million member AARP-Texas on the issues of community attendant care restoration and the ADA. We have also collaborated on community organizing in El Paso and Corpus Christi.

III. CTD Appointments/Affiliations

CTD works to place its staff and individual members on a variety of committees, workgroups, task forces and boards that have influence over issues of importance to Texans with disabilities. Once at the table, CTD staff and members are active participants.

Staff placements:

Gubernatorial appointee, The State Independent Living Centers (SILC) Board

CTD is working to increase SILC involvement in policy education and advocacy and take a proactive stance in planning the long term future of independent living services in Texas.

Appointee, SB 367 Housing Task Force, Texas Dept of Health and Human Services

CTD is using this policy forum to promote a more active role for public housing authorities in providing accessible, affordable, integrated housing.

Appointee, Institution to Community Coordination Pilot, Texas Rehabilitation Commission

CTD advocated for adoption by TRC of a plan to address the movement of people with disabilities out of institutions into the community, including the purchase of relocation services and strategies to provide service "bridges" while in the process of transferring out of institutions.

Appointee, New Accessibility Standards Task Force, Texas Dept of Licensing and Regulation

CTD is reviewing proposed changes in the state's accessibility codes.

Invitee, Architectural Barriers Focus Group, Texas Dept of Licensing and Regulation

CTD participated in identifying areas of concern in the architectural barriers program.

Appointee, Weatherization Policy Advisory Council, Texas Dept of Housing & Community

Affairs CTD reviews the state plan to ensure that people with disabilities are a target group for this free home weatherization program. Convinced weatherization providers to offer training on interacting with people with disabilities at their next state meeting.

Appointee, HR 3295 Help America Vote Act Advisory Committee, Office of the Secretary of

State. CTD is working with the Office of the Secretary of State on drafting rules to implement this federal legislation, which has provisions regarding accessible voting and secret ballot for all Texans with disabilities. CTD has submitted substantive comments that ensure that Texans with disabilities may vote freely and privately.

Invited Presenter, Secretary of State Election Law Seminar

“Polling Place Accessibility” to 300+ county judges and election officials.

Appointee, Advisory Council, SB 95 Evaluation of Personal Attendant Training Programs, Department of Human Services

CTD provides pilot project grantees across the state with technical assistance, support, and procedural guidelines for systems change goals affecting three community care projects.

Appointee, SB1586 Consumer Directed Services Committee

CTD promotes that people with disabilities control the recruitment, hiring, management, and firing of their personal assistants. Expansion of consumer directed services, including durable medical equipment and respite care are a part. The committee makes recommendation directly to the Legislature.

Invitee, Mental Health in the Community Round Table, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

CTD sat with law enforcement, judges, and community leaders to develop a response to high profile incidents between police and local law enforcement.

Appointee, Goodwill Central Texas Community Advisory Council

CTD advises on state advocacy issues related to employment of people with disabilities.

Appointee, State Self-Determination Policy Planning Group

CTD works to develop a blueprint for systems change so that people with disabilities may have more independence and control in their community living situation.

CTD Member placements:

Appointee, Architectural Barriers Adv. Committee, Texas Dept. of Licensing and Registration

Gubernatorial Appointee, Texas Council on Developmental Disabilities

Appointee, SB1586 Consumer Directed Services

Appointee, Rehab Council of Texas, DARS

Appointee, Board of Directors, Advocacy, Inc.

Appointee, Austin Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities

Appointee, Relay Texas Advisory Board

IV. Public Awareness, Other Projects, Programs and Awards

Texas PHA Project: This project provides training and technical assistance to Public Housing Authorities in Texas to increase integrated housing for people with disabilities, especially those individuals moving from institutions. Presentations included the conference of the National Association of Housing Resource Officials.

People with disabilities and the criminal justice system: CTD trained the Travis County District Attorney’s staff on interacting with witnesses, perpetrators and crime victims with disabilities.

“Team Everest ’03: Shattering Stereotypes on Mt. Everest” Released: This 19 minute documentary chronicles how Team Everest twice made history: first becoming the largest cross-disability group to reach Mt. Everest Base Camp at 17,500 feet, then Expedition Leader Gary Guller becoming the first person with one arm to summit Mt. Everest at a dizzying 29,000+ ft!

Team Everest: Public Awareness of the Potential of People with Disabilities: CTD developed a multimedia presentation on Team Everest that was given ten times this year. The presentations featured slides, video and first hand accounts by Gary Guller of the internationally recognized expedition. Presentations included the Inclusion Works! conference, the state independent living conference and the National Barristers Convention.

Cinema Touching Disability Film Festival: CTD created what is believed to be the first Texas film festival focusing on people with disabilities. Using the media of film, CTD showed how cinema has reflected the changing societal role of people with disabilities. CTD recovered a copy of an 1898 short by Thomas Edison called “The Fake Beggar”, considered the first movie portrayal of disability. Long thought to be lost, this 45 second film was publicly screened for the first time in over 100 years. Nationally known filmmaker Tim McCanlies spoke at the festival. The film festival received substantial coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and TV.

Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP): For the last five years CTD has operated outreach, providing financial assistance to individuals with disabilities, so that they may purchase specialized telephone equipment at no cost to them.

HAVA-Help America Vote Act

CTD developed and conducted 10+ trainings on the new federal law that makes it easier than ever for voters with disabilities to participate in this basic right.

Advocacy workshops were delivered in Sherman and the state independent living conference and an advocacy presentation was given in El Paso. CTD was a sponsor of the 2 “Opportunity Knocks” advocacy/public relations workshops in Dallas and Houston.

Youth Leadership Projects: the Kenny Murgia Memorial Scholarship and the CTD Internship Program: CTD awards the Kenny Murgia scholarship annually to one high school senior with a disability whose leadership skills have enhanced the lives of people with disabilities in their community. This year’s winner is Mario Gonzales Jr., a young man with epilepsy from Pasadena. Mario is a freshman at Texas A&M.

CTD also offers young people with disabilities the opportunity to intern at CTD offices in Austin, TX. This year’s intern is William Greer, who graduated from college with a degree in political science. William’s successful internship will turn into a part-time job with CTD in January 2005.

Improving Accessibility to the Austin City Limits Music Festival

The nationally known music festival is held in a park and generally has good accessibility once inside the grounds. Getting to the front gate was the problem. CTD worked with Austin City Limits to redesign the transportation access so that people with disabilities can enter without having to deal with ditches and slopes.

Information and Referral

Each year CTD provides hundreds of Texans with disabilities information and referral services relating to financial, legal, housing, transportation, accessibility and employment issues.

Awards

- Team Everest was the big winner at the 2003 Barbara Jordan Media Awards “for excellence in the communication of the reality of disabled people”. Three awards were won, for Photojournalism, News Articles and Special Contributions by an Organization. These awards recognized the extensive positive media garnered by Team Everest.
- CTD received the Partnership Award from the Austin Mayor’s Committee on People with Disabilities.
- CTD’s Livable Communities cooperation with AARP was recognized as one of the “20 Texas Accomplishments to Celebrate in 2003” by the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities.