

Airplane and Motorcycle Rides Enhance 2007 MegaConference

"It takes an entire village to raise a child"...The 2007 (5th Annual) Tennessee Disability MegaConference is behind us now. By all accounts, including the feedback we have received at our end of the conference wrap-up meeting, and the evaluations we have read from attendees, it would seem that most people are in agreement that this year's conference was the best to date for a variety of reasons.

Every volunteer who attended the conference and/or worked on one of our many conference committees should take great pride in the results of your hard work. Every agency and organization that contributed time, energy, ideas, human resources, or financial assistance needs to be thanked and appreciated for contributing to the success and growth of the conference.

Special thanks needs to go to the Airport Marriott and their many dedicated staff and management personnel who worked so hard behind the scenes to ensure that each of us had a worthwhile and pleasurable experience.

The magnitude of the work and pre-planning that goes into coordinating the conference continues to grow proportionately with the growth of the conference itself. This year we had over seven hundred and thirty registered attendees, and that number does not include the conference presenters, volunteers, walk-ins, or exhibitors. The total number of conference attendees surpassed one thousand (1000) people for the first time in 2007!

Our shared vision to have a regional conference with the involvement and participation of the entire Tennessee disability community working together to ensure its success continues to evolve. The underlying theme of the conference is to showcase the ideas and principles of inclusion, while at the same time to recognize and demonstrate the competence and contributions of individuals with a disability.

At the conclusion of the 2006 conference, we received feedback

that there were not enough activities for people to observe or participate in during the conference. With that in mind, adjustments and tweaks were made to the overall conference program planning infrastructure for this year.



The story and feedback that immediately follows, written by Suzanne Colsey, emphasizes the attempts by all conference stakeholders to continue to learn from our mistakes, and make changes that will improve the conference and empower people to have a "voice" in our direction in the years to come.

Suzanne Colsey - MegaConference 2007 was a big success with all of the informative workshops, but the best part was the "extreme sports" activities that

took place on Friday during the conference. First of all, Dany Gonzalez took Melissa Allen and me up in his four-seater airplane. When we got to the airfield where the aircraft were stored, an individual who was working on his own plane got two mechanics to assist us getting into the plane. It was Melissa's first time flying; however, she thought it was awesome! As for myself, I had been on commercial flights before, but never in the front seat with a steering wheel in front of me. We thought that we would have a leisure flight around Nashville, but no, Dany put

my hands on the steering wheel and showed me how to fly and to land the plane. It was scary and exciting all at once, but it was a learning experience for everyone involved because it opened everyone's mind to the realm of possibilities for people with disabilities. After getting our feet back on the ground, we went back to the hotel where we took a motorcycle sidecar ride with Ron

Brant. It was great to be able to go fast and have the wind blowing in our faces. In my opinion, this was the best conference yet and I can't wait until next year!

Special thanks to Ron Brant for the motorcycle sidecar experiences and to Daniel Gonzalez for the Cessna airplane experiences, as their personal contributions and the time commitment that they both made certainly enriched lives and improved the fun factor for this year's conference attendees.



crisis category of need and 90 days if they are in the urgent or active categories of need.

People First Settlement Agreements:

- Requires ongoing public campaign of outreach and education to persons who are potentially eligible for community based waiver services.
- Requires State to access needs of eligible persons and plan for necessary services by gathering information and reporting on the numbers of eligible persons in each county.
- State will amend the Interagency Agreement to reflect that DMRS may provide waiver services to school age children and will notify the other agencies included in the current Interagency Agreement.

Other Programmatic Changes in DMRS:

- Development of an infrastructure plan to identify gaps, capacity issues, and ways to address issues identified
- Revision of the intake and eligibility procedures.
- Development of procedures for moving between the different waivers.
- Development of a hearing process to challenge the category of need assigned to an individual. There is already a hearing process in place for denials of eligibility (PAE) and delays in receiving services once a person is enrolled (Grier appeals process).
- A Statement of Rights will be developed and provided to everyone on the waiting list as well as anyone else who applies for services through DMRS.
- Annual regional meetings will be held with individuals and families of people on the waiting list.
- The DMRS Family Handbook, currently under revision, will be provided to everyone on the waiting list as well as to new applicants.

What People Should Do:

- If you are on the waiting list, make contact with the DMRS regional office to see if you are eligible for ICF/MR waiver services and to have your category of need reassessed. Keep in touch regularly so that your file is updated. This is important because people in the “deferred” category will not receive consumer directed support.
- If you are not on the waiting list but think you are eligible for services, contact the regional office immediately to begin the process.
- If you know someone who may be eligible for services,

help that person contact the regional office immediately to begin the process.

Telephone numbers for the regional offices are:

East Tennessee (Knoxville)

888-531-9876 (toll free)

865-588-0508

Middle Tennessee (Nashville)

800-654-4839 (toll free)

615-231-5049

West Tennessee (Memphis)

800-308-2586 (toll free)

901-213-1800