

October 21, 2005

Dear Friends:

September was an exceedingly busy month and I would like to bring you up to date on the Alliance for Full Participation Summit, the "AAMR Day" at the Summit as well as some strategic priorities for the next several months.

Alliance for Full Participation

Four weeks ago, 11 disability organizations, including AAMR, completed an historical summit – the Alliance for Full Participation conference in Washington DC. The meeting was notable for a legion of reasons not the least of which was that a substantial number of the attendees were either self advocates or family members. It was a time to reconnect with old friends, to share ideas, and to recommit ourselves to the shared mission of improving the lives of people with developmental disabilities. Under the banner of "Many Voices, One Vision," these 11 organizations representing people with disabilities, family members, policy makers and administrators, advocates, professionals, researchers, and people who provide support to people with developmental disabilities put away their organizational differences and came together to affirm a set of common aspirations for the future.

Among the affirmations (the full text of which can be found on the AAMR website), was a commitment to cease the placement of children in institutions, to develop plans for the closure of remaining large public institutions, to favor real jobs and real volunteer opportunities over sheltered workshops, to provide the support needed by all families with sons and daughters with lifelong disabilities; to include people with disabilities wherever decisions are being made about their destinies; to eliminate the term mental retardation in favor of a less hurtful term, to support individual control over budgets and supports, to pay direct support professionals a decent wage, to reform Medicaid to promote inclusion, and to nurture inclusive communities.

Implementation of this vision will continue to be the task of the newly constituted alliance as well as the state teams that also came together in Washington and that will carry the message of the Summit back to their communities.

AAMR Annual Meeting

We also had an annual meeting of AAMR in the day before the Summit that included a description of some of the exciting new action teams that are being proposed (i.e. exploring the implications of the Medicare Drug benefit for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, and creating a coalition to enrich and expand opportunities for self-determination) and the emerging plans for newly constituted divisions (i.e., nursing, and religion and spirituality). During lunch we heard from three young members (a postdoctoral fellow, a junior faculty member and a student) – Anna Esbensen, Julia Scherba de Valenzuela and Amy Drahota – about what they value in a professional organization. The Conference and the Assembly met and we concluded a full day with the Presidential Address by David Coulter and the AAMR awards ceremony.

Priorities

The Board also had a short meeting before the Summit and discussed strategic priorities for the organization in the next year. Four goals were set:

- To align the mission of the organization and the work of the members with the organization's identity and its name;
- To empower the grass roots of AAMR by continuing to urge communities of interest to form action teams and to stimulate the development of action plans for professional and geographic interests
- To continue to identify, attract and support new leadership in AAMR and in our field;
- To develop training initiatives with the support of professional and geographic interests (e.g., surrounding health issues, environmental issues, etc.).

Please feel free to comment on these goals and let me know if you are interested in supporting any of these initiatives.

Organizational Identity

As noted in my summary of the affirmations growing out of the Summit, there was a strong consensus among the 2400 attendees that the term "mental retardation" has to go. I know that in time another term may also be stigmatizing. I know that our name is well known in research and academic circles. I know that some will argue that "mental retardation" is a term of art in statutes. I also know that there will be concerns that a name change may jeopardize our work on terminology and classification. However, I believe that all of these issues can be addressed and resolved and our core mission preserved. In the end, if we want to continue to be among the leaders in our field, then we must show self advocates and families that they have been heard." The AAMR Board voted to change its name about 6 years ago. Since then, however, we have been unable to arrive at a consensus about what name to embrace. I would like to begin a structured process that will result in what I hope is a resolution to this pending question. The following is the process that I hope we can pursue:

1. I would like to invite suggestions from the membership regarding what the organization should be called. Please visit the AAMR website and register your nominations by [clicking here](#) or send them to me at vbradley@hsri.org.
2. In December, at the Mid Winter Leadership Meeting, we will review the suggestions and arrive at a manageable list.
3. The list will be reviewed to ensure that the names are consistent with the research, scientific and philosophical mission of the organization;
4. A short discussion paper will be prepared listing the pros and cons of each new name;
5. The list will be put before the membership for a vote.

I am hoping that this entire process will be completed by the end of my term on July 1, 2006 and that we will arrive at a generally agreeable resolution to an issue that has complicated our organizational deliberations and that has become an increasing barrier to communication with those for whom we do what we do.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to this organization that has become an integral part of many of our professional careers. After this extraordinary Summit, I am very optimistic that we can take the next steps that will bring AAMR closer to its mission and that will align us with the affirmations that we all made in Washington DC last month.

Valerie J. Bradley
President, American Association on Mental Retardation