5-3-2010

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FROM RICHARD ROBERTS, RETIRING DIVISION DIRECTOR: FAREWELL, AND ON TO NEW ADVENTURES

May 3, 2010 by JoLynne Lyon

This post first appeared in the Champions for Inclusive Communities newsletter on April 30, 2010.

Dear Readers,

After thirty years of continuous program funding through the U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau’s Division for Children with Special Health Care Needs, I will be retiring from Utah State University on July 31, 2010. I have been so fortunate to work with many people who have had connections with our centers and grant efforts over this time period. So many changes have occurred. As a national group of concerned parents, families, and program officers at the state and federal level partnering with National Centers and grantees, we can see a real difference in the lives of the children, youth, families and parents with whom we work alongside.

The progress and outcomes are stunning. State programs which used to be hidden in a large bureaucracy no longer work with "crippled children" and are in the midst of huge systems change processes to create broadly based initiatives and partnerships. In doing so, we ensure that what the system has to offer is the very partnership that parents, youth, health financing, education systems, and private sector hospitals and clinics are seeking. We are all moving community-based systems of care forward to serve children with special needs and their families. Obviously we are not there yet; but together, we have made what might have been seen as impossible in 1983 into the expected norm for all children now in 2010.

When I signed onto this journey, 2010 seemed like a very long time line. We have learned much as a concerned and committed group comprised of parents, kids, teenagers, service and support providers, researchers, program managers, state legislators, school teachers and administrators, faith-based support programs, hospital administrators, and the list goes on and on. WOW, is about all I can say as I sit back and reflect on this movement. Some of the early birds in this effort are still at it, pounding the pavements along the way to keep the momentum moving forward. Some have retired after having worn themselves out by never even thinking, "no, we can’t do this."

When I think of the mentors who set me straight over the last thirty years, I am so thankful for their patient, honest, and open exchanges of how to get there, and about what they thought I should be doing along the journey. In the first conference that I was privileged to sponsor in Hawaii in 1984, participants included family members, researchers, program providers, and state and federal program officers.

Retiring does not mean I won’t still be active; but I will be active in different ways, pushing community-based systems of care as they are the foundation of making things work. Thank you all for your support of all of our collective efforts. Keep the stories of successful community-based service systems flowing so that we, as a collective family, can continue to champion the cause and recognize the progress being made by pushing those boulders out of the way. Keep a lookout for the book on these communities. I don’t think we can do a movie!

Sincerely,

Richard Roberts
Director, Champions for Inclusive Communities

Director, Early Intervention Research Institute, Center for Persons with Disabilities

Utah State University