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CPD LEGACY STORY: ANDREA PITTS

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This first CPD Legacy Story of 2011 is from Andrea Pitts who has been associated with CPD projects for over five years. Her story covers a wide range of experiences that you will enjoy reading about.

My name is Andrea Pitts. I have been involved in various projects with the CPD since 2005. I started as an advocate, speaking solely from personal experience, as I have a physical disability of my own. However, as I progressed through my schooling to become a social worker, I found myself combining my professional training with my life experiences, which helped broaden my perspective as an advocate.

The first project I participated in was the Medical Home. It was initially meant to teach medical professionals the importance of early preparation for transition from pediatric care to adult health care services. However, it later evolved into a greater goal of providing resources for both medical professionals and the families dealing with the disability on a daily basis. Throughout the three year project, I worked with my peers refining the Medical Home website and speaking publicly about my own transitional process. The Medical Home project was my first significant experience as an advocate and the passion I developed from making our voices heard has been absolutely invaluable for me both personally and professionally.

After closing the Medical Home project in 2008, I was asked to help launch the Becoming Leaders of Tomorrow (BLT) training and advocacy group. The goal of this group was to help individuals with disabilities gain the skills and opportunities needed to empower themselves to direct their own goals for the future. As the group progressed, we created a toolkit that can be found on the BLT website: http://blt.cpd.usu.edu/Contact.html. The toolkit encompasses information on various topics ranging from education, employment and tips for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The BLT project was another great stepping stone for my growth as an advocate. I worked more closely with individuals with various types of disabilities, not just physical. Gaining a greater multi-dimensional perspective of the disability community not only strengthened my voice as an advocate, but also my perspective of individuals, as a social worker.

While I was pursuing my Masters Degree in Social Work last year, I was asked to participate in 2009-2010 Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND) training program. I represented the Social Work portion of the interdisciplinary hands-on learning approach of the URLEND program. Though there were many other aspects of URLEND that are memorable for me, the activities I remember the most were the clinics. We were asked to visit various clinics throughout Salt Lake City and Logan and work closely with families to provide any support or expertise they may need, but also to learn about the daily struggles they experience as a caregiver of a child with a disability. These clinical experiences were absolutely invaluable to my professional perspective. I was able to see the advantages of "one stop shopping" clinics where the child was able to see many disciplines (audiologist, speech pathologist, orthopedic specialist etc.) during one half day appointment rather than having to make multiple visits per month to ensure all the child's health issues were being monitored. Many parents personally praised the "one stop shopping," stating that it made life so much easier to get it all done in one day.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time as a URLEND trainee and the information that I learned from the program as a whole will only help me better serve my future clients, both with and without disabilities.