



September 12, 2022

Members of the AAIDD Community –

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter to share news of the death of a valued member of AAIDD community, James (Jim) R. Thompson. Jim was a leading scholar in the intellectual and developmental disabilities research community and his contributions to AAIDD have been significant, substantial, and impactful. Jim served as the 2013-2014 President of the AAIDD Board of Directors and was the Editor of *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* from 2016 through July of this year. Jim was also a Professor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas and served as a Senior Scientist at the Beach Center on Disability and an Associate Director of the Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities. Prior to joining KU in 2016, Jim was a Professor at Illinois State University for over 20 years.

In all of these roles, Jim sought to advance research, policy, and practice that enhanced the quality of life of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Throughout his career, he fostered collaborative opportunities that engaged, supported, and mentored colleagues, self-advocates, and emerging scholars. Anyone who had the honor and opportunity to work with Jim, valued his mentorship, collaborative nature, and friendship. And so many in the intellectual and developmental disabilities field have been shaped by Jim and his work. One of Jim's most significant impacts has been the definition and advancement of the supports paradigm, work that led to the development, publication, and widespread adoption and use of the *Supports Intensity Scale* (SIS). The SIS has been transformative in intellectual disability research, policy, and practice, and provided the first valid and reliable means of assessing and understanding people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by their support needs. The widespread adoption of the SIS across the United States and the world demonstrates this impact and the legacy that Jim leaves for the field. To recognize this work, the Board of AAIDD has awarded Jim its Distinguished Career Recognition in August 2022 and his contributions will be recognized at the 2023 AAIDD annual meeting.

For Jim, however, it was never about personal recognition, it was always about recognizing and celebrating all the people that advanced change – including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As he wrote about the first edition of the SIS:

Behind every successful invention, there are people, and this is an acknowledgement of the hard work and commitment of the people who made Supports Intensity Scale happen. And for self-advocates, the SIS is the dawn of something new, a journey down a progressive path that understands them as capable human beings who have needs like all of us and just need a little support to achieve their life goals and aspirations.

Jim's work, his values, and his drive to advance the supports paradigm have indeed created something new. Something new that all of us must continue to advance, advocate for, and integrate into our research, policy, and practice. Jim's focus on seeking out the strengths and supports of everyone

Knowledge | Support | Empowerment

around him will be missed, and I challenge all of us in AAIDD to honor Jim's legacy and continue to push forward the vision he has co-created with so many others in AAIDD and beyond, ensuring each person with intellectual and developmental disabilities has access to the personalized supports they need and want to live, learn, and contribute to their communities.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to [me](#) if you want to share thoughts or stories about Jim, and we will share ongoing details about how Jim's contributions to AAIDD will be recognized.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karrie A. Shogren', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karrie A. Shogren, PhD, FAAIDD
Professor and Senior Scientist, University of Kansas
President, AAIDD Board of Directors, 2022-2023