

A PUBLICATION  
OF THE  
AAIDD  
STUDENT AND  
EARLY CAREER  
PROFESSIONAL  
SPECIAL  
INTEREST  
GROUP  
(SECP SIG)

# AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional Newsletter

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## Here is the Latest Issue of the AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional Newsletter!

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This newsletter focuses on connecting and sharing information with students, young professionals, and their mentors in the field of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). We hope you find this newsletter to be a useful resource. We invite you to get involved in the many ongoing activities of the SECP

SIG.

If you are interested in joining our SIG on Students and Early Career Professionals, you may sign up online when you join or renew your membership in AAIDD, or you may contact Jason Epstein [jepstein@aaidd.org](mailto:jepstein@aaidd.org) for more information. We look forward to hearing from you!



## AAIDD 2012 Annual Conference

The 136<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of AAIDD will be held in Charlotte, North Carolina at the Westin Charlotte from June 18-21. While there are many ways for students and early career professionals to be involved during the AAIDD Annual Conference, we would like to share with you some specific events to which we encourage your attendance. We will share greater details regarding scheduling of each event in our May newsletter issue. Go to the AAIDD website for more information on this year's conference. Hope to see you there!

### Sunday, June 17:

- President's Reception

### Monday, June 18:

- Open Membership meeting
- Pre-conference sessions with a variety of half and full day specialty sessions
- Special evening event

### Tuesday, June 19:

- Meetings of divisions, chapters, special interest groups, and task forces

- Poster session and reception
- Special evening event
- Paul H. Brookes Student and Early Career Professionals happy hour reception

### Wednesday, June 20:

- SECP SIG Luncheon
- Meetings of divisions, chapters, special interest groups, and task forces
- Screening of the winner of the 2012 media award

### Thursday, June 21:

- Post-conference sessions with a variety of half and full day specialty sessions



# Shhhh... Happy New Year! : My professional New Year's Resolution

I love technology. Waking up Christmas morning to the smell of new electronics is invigorating. (OK, let's be realistic, I'm a genXer so I fulfilled my need for immediate gratification and opened things a couple weeks early.) I thoroughly enjoy spending time tinkering with devices to figure out all they can do, how to make them work best for me, finding apps that are the most innovative, useful, and fun. Like many early career professionals, I find it wonderful and amazing to be able to get all the information I could ever want by typing a few words, opening an app, speaking a request... and viola!

As early career professionals we want to do it all: learn more, share our ideas, develop innovative programs, work with experienced colleagues, make things happen, move forward, save the world... BZZZZZ, Squeek, Beep (modem sounds from the past), but wait, can we do it? Do we know it all just because we have had childhood experiences beyond the imaginations of those before us, educations from great institutions, mentors teaching us about best practice, knowledge of a history of neglected civil rights and institutionalization, and of course insurmountable information at our fingertips? What about the personal stories, the system and program history, the ideas from others? This is information we can't forget and has great impact on the work we do now and in the future.

This is why I say Shhhh...when thinking of my New Year's professional resolution. Educators are taught to use a "wait-time" of between 3-7 seconds when eliciting a response

from students. A comfortable silence? Try it. It can seem like an eternity. In a world where we are used to getting information in the blink of an eye these silences are becoming more and more rare. However they are important to allow others to collect their thoughts and give us time to truly be able to listen.



Listening, a critical component of collaboration, doesn't mean that all ideas are perfect, but conversations and idea sharing can lead to better ideas, greater advancement, effectiveness, and success. We need to challenge ourselves to support others to keep these ideas flowing through discussion, and pull together the pieces to develop strategies and innovative practices. We need to listen to remember the lessons of history, the knowledge and experience of self-advocates, families, mentors, and colleagues, and to form collaborations and share learning with generations, new and experienced, aimed at continuing the progression begun those who came before us.

## Save the date: AAIDD/ANCOR Joint Webinar

### Supporting People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the Development of Positive Relationships and Healthy Sexuality

January 26, 2012 1:00pm – 2:30pm EST

The development of positive social relationships and healthy sexuality are critical to people living quality lives. This webinar will focus on the importance of sexuality and sexuality education in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, specifically in light of current service delivery systems and person centered planning. Through her presentation, **Leslie Walker-Hirsch**, an internationally recognized expert on the subject, will emphasize the “normalness” of sexu-

ality and will offer suggestions to administrators, clinicians, family members, direct support professionals, advocates and self-advocates as to how they can support positive social development and sexuality for the people they serve. In this webinar, she will share information on the CIRCLES curriculum series; a multi media tool to effectively teach social boundaries to this group of learners that can be implemented across many settings by staff and families.

To register go to: <https://www2.gotomeeting.com/register/927266490>

Leslie Walker-Hirsch is an educational consultant who specializes in social and sexual development for individuals with intellectual disabilities. She is an advocate, author, lecturer and the co-creator of the **CIRCLES** curriculum series, a multi-media teaching series for improving social competence and judgment that is designed especially to address the learning styles of youth and adults with cognitive disabilities. The **CIRCLES** series is in its fifth iteration.

Her book, **The Facts of Life...and More**, released in 2007, is currently available from Paul H. Brookes or on her website. This book was voted “**Winner Best Special Needs Titles**” by Exceptional Parent Magazine in 2007

Her publications include: **Down Syndrome: Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**, Chapter 22 “Building Relationships/Social and Sexual Development”, **A Guide to Consent**, Chapter 4 “Consent to Sexual Activity”, as well as many articles in journals and newsletters.

She is the founder and chairperson of the AAIDD Special Interest Group on Social and Sexual Concerns, former President of the General

Division of AAIDD and has achieved fellowship status in that organization.

Leslie Walker-Hirsch is a member of the National Clinical Advisory Board of the National Down Syndrome Society and served on the Proctor and Gamble panel of experts for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of Alta Mira Specialized Family Services in Albuquerque NM. Leslie has trained professionals in her unique strategies across the US and internationally. She teaches one course in the Graduate College of Education at the University of New Mexico.



Leslie Walker-Hirsch has a Master’s Degree in Special Education and Administration. She consults to schools, agencies and states to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities, their families and the professionals who support them on issues related to developing social competence and sexual safety.

## I/DD Abroad: Zhitomir, Ukraine

There's a saying that states, "Nothing that's worth having comes easy". I never truly understood the meaning behind these words until I began my current work with forgotten children with developmental disabilities living in Ukraine.

As an occupational therapist and sister of a person with a developmental disability, my life has always been rooted in helping others lead meaningful lives. During my doctoral studies in Occupational Therapy at Washington University Medical School, these roots grew into a dream of bringing light to people with disabilities living in the darkest corners of the world. Launching into the first year of my professional career as an OT, I have been earnestly seeking opportunities to bring meaning and purpose to the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities around the world. In February of this year,

after connecting with a non-profit organization called Mission to Ukraine, I embarked on the opportunity of a lifetime.

On a cold day in February, I boarded a plane headed for Zhitomir, Ukraine, a city located in the heart of the country. After acclimating to the 7-hour difference, Russian language, and Ukrainian winter I suddenly found myself surrounded by 80 young boys with profound disabilities in an isolated, rural orphanage within the Zhitomir region. Living in heart-wrenching conditions and considered to be "unteachable" by society, the boys of this orphanage live their daily lives in isolation and poverty. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, children with disabilities were marginalized and made virtually invisible during Soviet rule, leaving behind an infamous legacy of institutionalized care. Though quality of institutional care varies, nearly all institutions fail to provide sufficient services that support typical childhood development. As I looked into the eyes of the boys at the orphanage, I was looking at the proof of this reality.

I am now engaged in a 2-year consultative project with Mission to Ukraine, the organization that provides services to this orphanage of boys with disabilities. By applying principles that

*(Continued on page 5)*





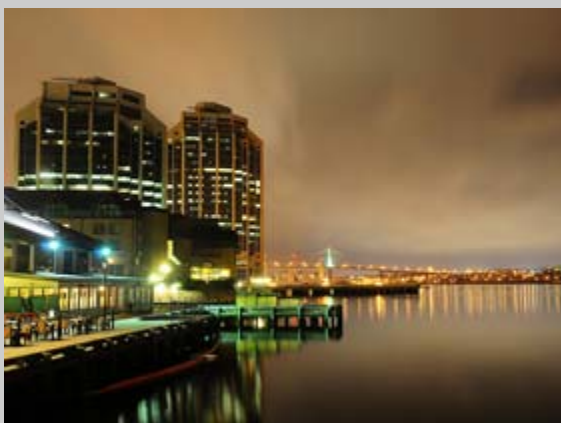
## I/DD Abroad: Zhitomir, Ukraine

*(Continued from page 4)*

are rooted in Occupational Therapy, I work to launch non-profit organizations like Mission to Ukraine into high-performing services that shape the societal attitudes toward people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Since initiating my work with Mission to Ukraine, we have doubled the amount of children they serve and have introduced various sustainable service structures including a functional skills program and a transition program for adolescents with disabilities.

In the fight against worldwide injustice toward people with disabilities, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable work to be done. But the truth is, as professionals working to achieve a better future for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, we must force ourselves into action. Strength is not found. Strength is developed. We can develop this strength most fully when we use our knowledge and skills to serve the needs of the world. It is time we become increasingly involved in impacting the societal

factors that contribute to the exclusion and deprivation of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In the end, we must come to our own conclusion about the dignity and value of every human life and how we live our lives in response to such injustice. A broken world needs you. But just remember – nothing that's worth having comes easy.



***Save the date!***

**The International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities (IASSID) 2012 World Congress will be held from July 9th-14th in Halifax, Nova Scotia.**

***We hope to see you there.***

## I/DD Abroad: OMID in Iran

### OMID early Intervention Program for Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents in Iran

#### Introduction

Parents of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder face many challenges in Iran. The story begins when the first signs are seen, generally by 18 months, and the diagnosis is yet to come. During this time many families have to live with uncertainty. Parents may suspect something is wrong with their much-loved child. But, other family members and relatives may try to console them by assuring that there's nothing to worry about. Even some professionals whom they consult (generally General Physicians or Paediatricians) may do this.

#### Present situation

Autism is still a new but trendy diagnosis for the Iranian professionals and there is still a long way ahead of the policy makers and service providers to offer satisfactory and sufficient services. Research findings indicate that parents of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) across cultures and countries have significant risks of disturbed health and well-being compared with parents of non-disabled children or children with other types of disabilities. Families need help and support in bringing up a child with ASD and the support received by the parents can reduce parental distress. Currently in Iran there are no early intervention programs for parents who have a child with ASD.

#### Omid early intervention program

To be able to support Iranian children with ASD and their families a series of activities and studies was undertaken. It was found that the prevalence rate for Autistic Disorder among Iranian 5 to 6 years old children is 6 in 10,000 and for ASD it is 24 in 10,000 (Samadi et al, 2011a). To get more

knowledge on the existing situation for people with ASD and to update information on ASD in Iran, three workshops for professionals in the field of ASD were held with the help of the experts from the University of Ulster. A survey was administered to 43 Iranian parents to assess their knowledge of ASD and the impact it had on their lives, as well as the advice and guidance they needed. This confirmed that the families faced similar stress and health problems as do parents in other countries. However many lacked accurate information about the condition and they had few opportunities to obtain advice and support for themselves as parents (Samadi 2011b).

In another study with 37 parents of children with ASD in Iran, it was reported that parental educational sessions provided parents with information that they found useful. The training sessions also influenced parental social networks and their advocacy (Samadi 2011c). Although the findings of the study supported the utility of parental training programs in Iran, there are various challenges to having these programs more widely available for Iranian families who have children with ASD. Based on the collected information and over 10 years of clinical experience, an early intervention parent- focused model which is called "Omid"<sup>1</sup> developed (Samadi 2011d). The first phase of the program is focused on the post-diagnosis information, in which parents are provided with information and advice via a booklet and resource kit to boost parent and child interaction. The second phase of the program which is in form of workshops and group educational sessions, focus on parental knowledge on ASD, different approaches for children with ASD, issues related to advocacy, group discussions and experience exchange. In phase three the main emphasis is on home visits. This is done as a one-to-one support of a professional for children and parents. The final

phase of the programme is to facilitate transition from home to school which is done by preparing both parents and personnel at the kindergarten and preschool level to understand ASD and children's needs in an educational setting. ('Omid in Persian and Kurdish means hope.)

### Conclusion

In summary it can be concluded that there is a need to support parents and carers of children with ASD in Iran. The dominant model of service provision for children with ASD in Iran have focused solely on improvement in children, although applications of these approaches could indirectly make parents less distressed through improvements that these approaches cause in children with ASD, it is argued that social models in which the family and cares are also considered could be more beneficial. Omid early intervention program is based on the social model of service provision for children with ASD and their families and it also tries to establish a good parent –professional relationship through visiting children in their natural context.

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- Samadi, S.A. (2011d). Early intervention Models for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families: "Omid" project in Iran. 20th Asian conference on Intellectual disability. The Republic of Korea. 21 to 26th August 2011.

## Leadership training grant opportunity!

The Department of Special Education at Vanderbilt University is the recipient of leadership training grants from the Office of Special Education Programs in the Department of Education. These grants provide doctoral students with tuition, monthly stipends, health insurance, and professional travel. This particular program aims to increase the number of well-qualified higher education faculty who have the skills and knowledge to improve research, teacher training, and educational outcomes for high-need students identified with severe disabilities or autism in grades K-12, including secondary transition. Program goals include: Hands-on experiences in high-need schools via internships supervised by Vanderbilt faculty mentors

and in collaboration with school personnel; Collaboration with experts in autism, intellectual disabilities, severe disabilities, and research methodology through internships with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. Rotating internships and seminars that address competency-building across research, teaching, and service experiences; Coursework in research methods and content areas to build skills to complete doctoral program milestones in a timely fashion. Applications are due March 15th, but early application is strongly encouraged. For more information, contact Carolyn Hughes at [carolyn.hughes@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:carolyn.hughes@vanderbilt.edu).



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

## Webinar: Using Large Data Sets

Deciding a line of research, developing research questions that impact policy and practice, and collecting enough data for analysis can be an intimidating and often frustrating process for any researcher but is especially daunting for doctoral students working on their dissertation. In our November webinar, the Student and Early Career Professional SIG, along with AUCD, hosted a webinar showcasing the use of large data sets in dissertation research. Titled *Using Large Data Sets to Examine Current Practices and Policies -- Addressing Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities*, researchers Dr. Mary Kay Rizzolo, Mr. Richard Hemp, and Dr. Karrie Shogren discussed the research opportunities and benefits of using large data sets for doctoral students or early researchers. Specifically, webinar attendees, both students and early researchers, learned about several projects utilizing public data sets and ways to access data.

The speakers began by briefly discussing their respective work with large data sets. Dr. Rizzolo shared her dissertation experiences and the finding that income per capita, state political culture (traditionalistic, individualistic, or moralistic), and state spending per capita for HSBC waiver predicted the use of state institutions. Mr. Hemp discussed the State of the States project (<http://sos.arielmis.net>) that examines the total state and U.S. spending for community services among disability groups and examines the significance of Medicaid funding to community based services. In her work with the National Longitudinal Transition Project-2 data set, Dr. Shogren discussed her IES funded secondary

analysis project examining high school to life outcomes across disability. Each project was unique and interesting.

More generally, the speakers shared critical resources for finding large data sets and advice for starting I/DD focused research projects. Collecting or accessing data sets large enough to work with, obtaining Institutional Review Board approval for subject research, and acquiring the funding and skills to analyze the data once it is available can serve as obstacles to the dissertation process. For instance, gathering large amounts of data to answer research questions can consume time and resources. The speakers suggested doctoral students consider participating on funded faculty projects at their respective university, utilize publicly available data, or contact other researchers who have conducted previous work to circumvent those obstacles. Using available data sets provides access to data in a timely fashion, thus avoiding uncontrollable impediments to dissertation progress such as low participation rates. Students may also receive funding for technical assistance (e.g., statistician) when working with funded faculty.

While it can take time to learn and sift through data, consider your dissertation as a journey to acquire the knowledge and skills for conducting future research. Start simple, do not be intimidated, and get it done!

If you missed this informative webinar, you can find it at [http://www.aucd.org/template/event.cfm?event\\_id=2760&id=740&parent=740](http://www.aucd.org/template/event.cfm?event_id=2760&id=740&parent=740)

**We hope you check it out!**



## Lessons Learned in an Academic Job Search

My intention here is not to dispense expert advice on how to secure an academic job, but rather to pass on some tips based on my own experiences earlier this year. I have attempted to chronicle some personal strategies that led to a productive search as well as some gaffes that you can avoid.

**Know your options:** Before I started looking for position openings, I listed down all the options that I would be willing to explore. This list included the disciplines (e.g. education, psychology, and human development), emphasis, and locations that I was open to and that my training qualified me for. Doing this helped me stay focused as I scanned position advertisements on Chronicle, highered-jobs.com, and professional organization job databases.

**Research the positions:** Whenever a position matched my interests and training, I tried to garner more information about the department (faculty, focus, potential teaching and research areas) and the university. Doing this not only helped me to further ascertain if the position would be right for me, but also gave me additional information to customize my application materials.

**Customize your application materials:** I had this suggestion made to me countless times when I embarked upon my job search, but I underestimated the amount of time I would need, to work on each application. Not only did each position require different application materials, but the uniqueness of each position compelled me to write a different cover letter. Although I did not need to customize my vita, teaching, and research statements, I did end up regularly (approx. twice a month) updating and polishing them.

**Be prepared for multiple interview formats:** Whereas I was prepared for conference, telephone,

and campus interviews, I had not quite primed myself for Skype interviews, a format that is becoming increasingly popular. You can browse the internet for excellent advice on a range of topics, right from how to dress to a good backdrop for a Skype interview. Based on my own experience, I would say it is extremely important to road test your equipment. During one Skype interview, my speaker or the interview panel's microphone malfunctioned and I ended up asking the interviewers to repeat each question multiple times. Towards the end of the interview I was too embarrassed to ask them to repeat. So, I simply started reading their lips, and answering the questions that I thought they were asking. Needless to say, I did not get invited to the campus.

**Campus visit:** You will probably get a ton of suggestions from your advisor and committee on how to prepare for the campus visit. However, there were two things that I wish someone would have thought to mention. Wear comfortable shoes and carry a small snack like a granola bar. I was fortunate to be invited to a university with a beautiful but humungous campus and the committee chair gave me a walking tour of the university grounds. At the end of the tour, my feet were killing me and I was famished. It did not help that I had to teach a class right after the tour.

**The phone call:** When you get that all-important call, stay calm. You will want to jump with joy and say yes, yes, yes...but thank the caller (usually the department chair), review with him/her the position details and request for some time to consider the offer. Good luck!





Knowledge Support Empowerment

## A Publication of the AAIDD Student and Early Career Professional SIG

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Collen McLaughlin, *New Year's Resolutions*

Emily Wallace, *Experiences in the Ukraine*

Sayyed Ali Samadi, *OMID in Iran*

Kim Wolowiec Fisher, *Webinar: Large data sets*

Aesha John, *Academic Job Search*

Archived issues of SECPC Newsletter available at :

[http://www.aaid.org/content\\_366.cfm?navID=115](http://www.aaid.org/content_366.cfm?navID=115)

### About SECP SIG

The goal of the AAIDD Ad Hoc Student and Early Career Professionals Committee (SECPC) is to develop and implement strategies that foster the involvement and representation of students, recent graduates, and professionals in the early stages of their careers within AAIDD. The committee is working on a number of initiatives and meets via teleconference once per month to provide one another with updates on committee initiatives and to share ideas. We are always interested in including more students and new members in our activities. Please contact Melissa DiSipio at [MDiSipio@pmhcc.org](mailto:MDiSipio@pmhcc.org) or Judith Gross at [jgross@ku.edu](mailto:jgross@ku.edu) if you would like to learn more about becoming involved in this active committee.

Please visit our website at:

[http://www.aaid.org/content\\_297.cfm?navID=86](http://www.aaid.org/content_297.cfm?navID=86)

## Not yet an AAIDD member.... Join Today!

AAIDD offers a number of membership options with a variety of benefits depending on the level you choose. Below we will highlight three types of membership that may be affordable for students and early career professionals

AAIDD offers an **International Electronic membership** for members residing outside of the U.S. or Canada for \$50, which offers electronic access to both **AJIDD and IDD** journals. Members at this level cannot hold office or vote in AAIDD

elections.

AAIDD offers a **Basic** membership for \$75, which offers electronic access to **AJIDD or IDD** journals. Basic members are eligible to hold office and vote in AAIDD elections.

AAIDD also offers a **Classic** membership for \$125, which offers electronic access to both **AJIDD and IDD** journals. Classic members are eligible to hold office and vote in AAIDD elections.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, members at all three levels have access to members-only web forums, delivery of electronic newsletters, and are entitled to member discounts for meeting registration, book store purchases, and job postings.

For more information on the various membership categories and to join AAIDD visit :

[http://www.aaid.org/content\\_120.cfm](http://www.aaid.org/content_120.cfm)

