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TAIRS News

Texas Alliance of Information and Referral Services is the state affiliate of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS).

TAIRS and Texas Shine Brightly in Houston for AIRS Conference

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We're Online!
www.tairs.org

CONTACT TAIRS

c/o La Juan Hollis
Treasurer

United Way of
Tyler/Smith County

4000 Southpark
Drive
Tyler, TX 75703
903-581-6376 x 210

TAIRS celebrated another successful year by presenting its distinguished service awards in May. Those honored exemplify the best in the information and referral field in leadership, customer assistance, and database management.

The AIRS conference was a stunning success due to outstanding professionals representing Texas I&R. Conference attendees commented about the friendliness of everyone in attendance.

Pictures of the AIRS conference are included throughout for those who may have forgotten your camera. There are also tidbits about the TAIRS award winners for I&R Specialist, Resource Specialist, and even the Clare

TAIRS 2009 Plans

Telma Longoria from the 2-1-1 in the Tip of Texas region is busy planning for the 2009 TAIRS Conference. Bring your sombreros, great sense of humor - and best of all, a learning attitude. TAIRS looks forward to seeing you there!

Rothmeyer Distinguished Award.

The 2009 AIRS conference has already started its planning process. Reno anyone?



David Jobe, President of TAIRS, welcomes AIRS attendees to Texas

Mary Cooksey Honored with Distinguished Service Award and Mary Ann Sides Receives I&R Specialist Recognition

Mary Cooksey, Director of Abilene's A Call for Help, was honored by TAIRS at the recent AIRS conference with the 2008 Clare B. Rothmeyer Distinguished Service Award. The award is given to the I&R professional who exemplifies a commitment to service and professionalism in the I&R field.

Cooksey's staff paid tribute to their leader with a short skit that displayed the many "hats" she wears throughout the days.

TAIRS understands how difficult it can be to perform many roles & wants to say "Thank You" for all of your hard work!

In the photo at left, Cooksey is joined by her supervisor Dixie Bassett and I&R specialist Mary Ann Sides, who was also honored with the Outstanding I&R Specialist award. Sides was nominated by Cooksey for her customer service approach and willing attitude to help callers find the services they need in the West Central area.

Congratulations Ladies!

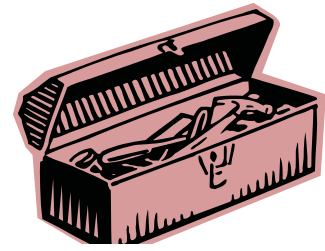


Outstanding Resource Specialist Award Presented to Darlene

La Juan Hollis, the director of 2-1-1 East Texas was more than pleased to present the Outstanding Resource Specialist award to Darlene McGill. Darlene has worked with the United Way of Tyler/Smith County for 15 years with 3 of those years in the 2-1-1 program. During that time she has put together an excellent resource database for the citizens of the East Texas area. "Darlene takes her job seriously," noted La Juan, "and she's always willing to help out when we need her."

Congratulations, Darlene!





COACHING TACTICS FOR IMPROVED EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

One of the new buzzwords in the supervision toolkit is coaching. The problem is most supervisors don't understand what coaching is, how to do it, or why it would benefit their agency.

According to the Center for Management & Organization Effectiveness, coaching is "the key to influencing, motivating, and recognizing people and employees who will contribute and cooperate with their leaders." In essence, it is a style of leadership that varies greatly from the traditional authoritarian approach to managing employees.

Employees may, at first, be confused by this style of management. Many of them have never felt ownership of their position before and have only been given small tasks that required little thinking and initiative on their part.

Coaching is not intuitive for most leaders since they may not have experienced it during their training. It requires managers to let go of traditional roles within the employee/supervisor function and allow others to be involved in the workplace.

Coaching starts with developing a relationship with the employee that establishes clear lines of expectations. The employee understands the full scope of their position and feel empowered to carry out their work within these boundaries. The most important question to ask when coaching an employ-

ee is "What do you want?"

Experts admit that for a manager, this is a scary question to ask. It then requires that the manager listen and see how the employer can meet those expectations.

Employers and employees may soon learn that not all expectations can be met through the current job role. Are there changes necessary for the job? Is it possible for the employee to gain what he or she wants in the current job? This type of open dialogue will help shape the course of the

job and the relationship that the supervisor has with the employee.

Employees develop their strengths through this process and can quickly learn how to identify their weaknesses. The result is an

atmosphere that values learning and continued improvement. Not only do the employee and the supervisor have a better relationship, but the consumer enjoys better service!

The most important question to ask when coaching an employee is "What do you want?"

CIRS/CRS Test Dates for 2009

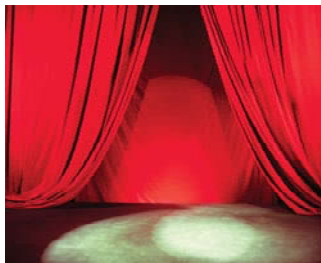
Feb. 20th, 1:30 - 3:30pm; contact **Mary Damsgaard** @ 210-350-7050 or mdamsgaard@unitedwaysatx.org

Austin - May 2009 - date pending

More site locations announcements still coming!



TAIRS board members pose for quick picture at the AIRS conference. Pictured Left to Right: Mary Cooksey, Janna Shoe, Dawn Sheffield, LaDelle Kay, Cindy Cornish, Liz Bergman, and Glenda Rogers.



Tax Time - Make it Pay for I&R Consumers

Economic Stimulus Payments - Where's Mine?

There are an estimated 30,000 persons in Texas have yet to claim their economic stimulus payments, according to the Internal Revenue Service. While many of these people have yet to file their 2007 taxes, some people may not understand that they are able to claim a stimulus payment since they do not traditionally file income taxes. The latest reports suggest the majority of the persons who still need to file a refund reside in Harris, Dallas, Bexar, Tarrant, El Paso, and Travis counties.

Some people may have moved since filing their taxes, causing their economic stimulus check to be returned to the IRS office. Until the address is updated with the IRS, the funds will remain unclaimed. The law states that the stimulus checks have to be sent out by **December 31st**. *This means that these taxpayers may miss out on receiving their stimulus payments all together.*

In order to claim a stimulus check, individuals who wouldn't normally file can a form 1040A and STIMULUS FILING at the top of the form to indicate that they only want to file for the stimulus payment. If they have not filed a form yet, these late filings can be processed in 2009.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

In late January 2009, VITA sites will open across the state to help low-moderate income families avoid paying for income tax filing. These sites concentrate on families who generally make less than \$45,000. Also, volunteers at these sites are trained to look for all possible deductions and credits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

EITC is a benefit to many low income who are struggling to make ends meet in these difficult economic times. In 2009, depending on income and family size, the credit could bring \$438 - \$4,824 to these budget-strained households.

Communities across the state vary in their approach to VITA sites. Some require appointments while others accept walk-ins. The I&R can help families by meeting with VITA officials in advance and learning basic referral guidelines. The bottom line is that the community needs the tax dollars returned as much as the individual needs help in their household - with programs like VITA, everyone wins!



Spring Health Awareness Issues: January

Cervical Health Awareness Month
Glaucoma Awareness Month
National Birth Defects Prevention Month
National Blood Donor Month

February

American Heart Month
National Cancer Prevention Month
National Children's Dental Health Month

March

National Brain Injury Awareness Month
National Kidney Month
National Multiple Sclerosis Education and Awareness Month.

AIRS Attendees kick up their heels at the George Ranch special event - is that Terryca Fuller?

RESOURCE TIPS



Updating Inclusion Criteria for I&R Databases

AIRS standards require that I&R databases have a set of inclusion and/or exclusion criteria. Not only does it lend professionalism to the database, but it can also help ward off trouble when organizations question the I&R's integrity by the programs that are listed.

There are times, however, when the inclusion criteria need to be updated or even changed completely. The tips below can help programs decide if it's time to update the existing criteria or develop new ones all together.

- **Has the organization developed new partnerships that necessitate expanding the database?** The expansion of programs may mean that not only does the database add agencies and programs, but the existing inclusion guidelines may need a revision in order to make the changes necessary. For example, did the new partnership mean adding for-profits to the database? If the previous inclusion criteria excluded for-profit organizations, it's time for an update.
- **Have a rash of scandals around a particular type of organization affected the types of referrals that are available?** If this is the case, it may be time to add information regarding when to exclude an agency or a type of referral if the previous guidelines did not include it.

- **Has funding decreased for a particular type of program in the agency such that it is not readily available any longer?**

While it may seem like this is just an unmet need for specialists to record during conversations with the callers, it could also signal an update or revision to the database guidelines. A step like this should be considered in cooperation with the I&R advisory committee to determine the best way to meet the community's needs.

The most important thing to remember when updating inclusion criteria is that it is not a one-person job (even if the program has only a few staff members). The advisory committee of the I&R program needs to review the current policy and reasons why it may need to be updated. Query other community members and ask them about the current policy and if revisions are warranted. Gather as much input as possible and then weigh the pros and cons.

The database manager may learn that there is also a specialized I&R that is providing services that would be covered under new revisions. If this is the case, should the inclusion criteria be revised or should an MOU be worked out for sharing information?

Just as it takes a coordinated effort to develop the agency's first inclusion/exclusion guidelines, it should also take the same effort to revise them. The program should gather the reasons it believes the criteria should be changed and share those with trusted partners of the I&R program in order to make the final decision.



Former TAIRS Board Members Kay Parker & Vicki Mize enjoy lunch at the AIRS conference.

TAIRS Board Members

David Jobe (through 12/ 2008)
President (AIRS Affiliate Representative)

United Way of Greater Houston
(713) 685-2309
djobe@unitedwayhouston.org

Debby Kimbrell (through 12/2010)
Vice-President
Community Council of Greater Dallas
214-954-4222
dkimbrell@ccgd.org

La Juan Hollis (through 12/2009)
Treasurer
United Way of Tyler/Smith County
903-581-6373 x 210
lhollis@uwtyler.org

Janna Shoe (through 12/2010)
Secretary
United Way of Greater Houston
361-742-5891
jshoe@unitedwayhouston.org

Mary Cooksey (through 12/2009)
Public Policy Committee
United Way of Abilene
325-676-7065
mary@unitedwayabilene.org

Cindy Cornish (through 12/2009)
Education Committee
Golden Crescent Regional Planning
Commission
361-578-1587
cindyco@gcrpc.org

Jacqui Elmore (through 12/2008)
Cal Farley's
800-657-7124 x 2627
jacquelineelmore@calfarley.org

LaDelle Kay (through 12/2008)
Membership Co-Chair
INFOline of Gregg County
Greater Longview United Way
903-236-9211
lkay@longviewunitedway.com

Telma Longoria (through 12/2009)
Membership Committee
Community Council of the Rio Grande
Valley
956-648-3515
cgrgv@cgrgv.org

Dawn Sheffield (through 12/2011)
Hopkins County Community Action
Network, CANhelp
903-885-9797
dawn@canhelponline.org

Kay Euresti (through 12/2008)
United Way of Capital Area
512-973-9203 x 55006
Kay.euresti@unitedwaycapitalarea.org

Glenda Rogers (through 12/2008)
Capital Area Council of Governments
Area Agency on Aging
512-916-6053
grogers@capcog.org

Rebecca Wright (through 12/2009)
Public Policy Committee
United Way of Tarrant County
817-635-4228
rwright@uwmtc.org

Terryca Fuller
Lackland AFB
2160 Kenly Ave
Lackland AFB, TX 78236
210-671-3722
terryca.fuller@lackland.af.mil

Dora Flores (12/2008)
City of El Paso Department of Public
Health
5115 El Paso Dr.
El Paso, TX 79905
915-771-5857
Dora.A.Flores@elpasotexas.gov

Board member Liz Bergman and Texas I&R Network's Deborah Ballard hum a few bars with George Ranch Singers!



Ranch hands from the George Ranch take time to teach AIRS participants the finer points of cattle branding - without the cattle!



Armadillo races weren't all the AIRS attendees enjoyed while at the George Ranch.