

The Lens



September 2007 Edition



“The Lens”: A lens is a means to bring clarity to something, allowing it to be better seen and understood; it is used to concentrate light on a subject. It brings things into focus.

Welcome to The Lens

Welcome to the new edition of the bimonthly newsletter from Developmental Disability Services of Jackson County – EITAS – formerly the Jackson County Board of Services for Developmentally Disabled.

Our last published newsletter was in the spring of 2004. Many people have expressed an interest in receiving regular updates about our activities, so our Board of Directors readily agreed for us to start publishing a new newsletter. In addition to

this hard copy print, we will make it available on our website, (www.eitas.org) where you can also find copies of our monthly meeting minutes and other important information about developmental disability services in Jackson County. We hope you will find this newsletter helpful and informative. If you have any questions or comments on any of the articles, please feel free to contact us by phone, email, or regular mail. We appreciate your support and input. 📧

New Board Members: EITAS welcomed two new board members appointed by Jackson County Executive Mike Sanders in May.



Barbara Winkler

Ms. Winkler is a guidance counselor for the Blue Springs R-IV School District and brings many years of advocacy and involvement with developmental disabilities. She has an adult daughter with developmental disabilities and spent several years on the board of directors of IBS Sheltered Workshop.



Tom Davis

Mr. Davis is the CEO of Meyer Companies, Inc., a general contracting, renovation and construction firm. Mr. Davis is a registered professional engineer. His volunteer efforts include serving on the Missouri State Board of Education from 1987 to 2006 and he has also served on the Kansas City Area Development Council. Tom has a grandson with autism and was recently appointed to the State Blue Ribbon Panel on Autism.

We Changed Our Name

We are pleased to announce that the Board of Directors of the Jackson County Board of Services for Developmentally Disabled has decided to change our name. During our strategic planning process we met with many different stakeholders across Jackson County. One issue that kept cropping up was our name. Many people had never heard of the “Board of Services”, and many more who knew the name did not have a clue as to what we were and what kind of things we did. We had comments that the name was too long; it was too confusing or not descriptive enough. And it certainly did not focus on the primary things we do. So we began working on a plan to change our name to something more descriptive. Something that tells people about us and what we believe in.

As a result, after working with a local public relations firm on a number of options, a new name was agreed upon. It was approved by the Board in April and announced publicly at our annual meeting on May 22, 2007. Our new name is:

Developmental Disability Services of Jackson County



Empowering individuals through advocacy and support

The word “eitas” is an acronym for empowering individuals through advocacy and support. Although a created word, the root word “ei” means to go on a journey and the word “tas” means goodbye. The logo represents a road to travel into a bright future – something we feel all persons have a right to. You will begin to see our new name and logo appearing all over Jackson County. In a way it marks a new start and a re-birth for our agency as we embark on our next 30 years. 🏡



UPDATE

Meeting Notice

The Board of Directors for Developmental Disability Services of Jackson County – EITAS meets monthly during the year. All meetings are open to the public and we appreciate input and public comments. The Planning and Services Committee and Properties Committee meet the third Wednesday of each month starting at 4:30 p.m. at our administrative offices. The Finance Committee meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. prior to our full Board Meeting at 7:00 p.m. that same day. Our meetings schedule is also available on our website at www.eitas.org.

Strategic Planning Process

On March 1st, 2005, CIC Planning Group entered into an agreement with the then Jackson County Board of Services to lead a project which, according to members of the Board, would assist the Board in identifying what excellence in service to people with developmental disabilities means to the operational and funding practices of the JCBS.

The strategic planning process came to be known as Creating Intentional Change because the Board sought to direct and be proactive in focusing the future of our organization rather than simply waiting for the inevitable change to knock on its door. This project has taken on the informal agenda of sustaining the strengths of the past while encouraging the investigation of alternative service models and strategies for the future. The strategic plan was finalized and approved in July of 2006, and like any good strategic plan will be reviewed and modified on a regular basis as needs and issues change. The most current version of the plan is posted to our old website at www.jcbsdd.com or at our new website www.eitas.org. It is also available in hard copy at our offices. Just request one and we will be glad to give it to you. 📄

🌟 Topic for Discussion

Owning Buildings Versus Leveraging Taxpayer Funds

Since its creation in 1977, EITAS has followed a plan to meet the facility needs of residential services, sheltered workshops, and day habilitation services by building or acquiring buildings to serve those purposes, and then leasing the facilities to independent providers to operate and provide services. This model has been successful and may have been the only alternative at that time to provide services and to develop new programs to meet the needs of persons with developmental disabilities.

As a result of this model, EITAS has amassed a large amount of real estate and property. As of the 2006 audit, we have property (at cost, less depreciation) valued at \$14.3 million dollars, with an estimated insurance replacement cost of \$26.7 million. In addition to owning the properties, we also have the obligation to insure, maintain and renovate them. This involves a sizable cost both in dollars and administration:



- In the last five years alone we have spent over \$4.2 million dollars on facilities and upkeep.
- In this year's 2007 budget we have \$1,071,000 scheduled for maintenance, repairs and improvements.
- Our property insurance costs in 2007 are \$75,655.
- Grounds keeping costs are at \$28,000
- Alarm system costs are \$12,000
- Maintenance contracts are at \$28,000

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Program Updates

Transportation Services

Our Department of Transportation (DOT) is undergoing continual improvement as we seek to provide more and better transportation services to Jackson County citizens with developmental disabilities. Since taking the direct management of DOT back from a private company in June of 2006, we have been able to add new routes, and improve existing routes to reduce ride times and allow for more people to have transportation. We currently transport around 430 persons a day from home, to work, and back again. For safety and security measures we are in the process of installing surveillance systems on all of our buses. This equipment will include cameras, microphones and instrumentation that records activity inside the bus, as well as vehicle speed, location and other operational factors of the vehicles. All records of activities on the buses will be for the internal use of DOT management only, and

will remain confidential at all times. We have also requested 19 new vehicles through the Federal Transportation Authority and MoDOT Grants.

Vocational

Workshop and employment services and funding have continued to expand in 2007. Our budget this year gave a \$672,000 increase to the workshops and related vocational services over 2006 funding levels. In addition, another \$555,000 was devoted to improving the workshop facilities. EITAS is working closely with all the workshops to insure that programs are viable and that new and appropriate employment opportunities are being developed for people with developmental disabilities.

Annual Report

Our annual report is now available. We have copies available at all of our board meetings, or they can be mailed to you upon your request.

Residential

Residential services in 2007 received a 30% increase in funding compared to 2006. Our funding this year has moved from providing dollars for operational items to supporting direct services to individuals. Emphasis is being placed on providing a better quality of life for all residents. In addition, we are currently working on the development of two new Level III group homes, the extensive remodeling of an existing Level III group home, and the development of a 15 unit apartment complex.

Needs Assessment

In order for us to develop comprehensive approaches to service needs now and in the future, EITAS in conjunction with the Institute for Human Development, has been working on a needs assessment for Jackson County for the past 8 months. Existing data on a number of issues has been totally lacking or unavailable

and we hope this study will give us as complete data and information on persons with developmental disabilities and their needs as possible. Copies of the needs assessment report will be available after September 1st, 2007.

Support Services

In 2006, EITAS began a new service to promote quality and accountability in the services we fund. We now have three persons in that department whose job is to monitor all the providers we fund and the services they provide to ensure that persons with developmental disabilities are getting the services they need and that those services are of the highest quality. Anyone who is having problems with the services they are receiving through an EITAS funded provider should feel free to contact Nancy Nicolaus at 816-363-2000.

Many of the properties owned by EITAS have considerable drawbacks. For instance, the majority of group homes owned by EITAS were once single family residences that were converted into group homes. To be sure, most of these homes are within the community, and therefore, desirable from an integration standpoint. However, the homes are often inadequate as far as size, accessibility, and design to meet the needs of the residents. For example, one home is being vacated by an agency because older residents can no longer handle the climb to their third floor bedrooms or egress using the fire escapes. Our Board has made a commitment that any future residential projects EITAS will be involved in will be totally accessible buildings for whatever level of care or disability.

I. Some other drawbacks and comments about EITAS owning real estate

- Most leases with providers are for \$1 a year: this gives EITAS no income on the property.
- **No reimbursements:** No entity, neither Medicaid nor the State of Missouri, pays us or reimburses us for anything on the property we own.
- **Lack of real taxpayer gain:** The taxpayers of Jackson County receive no benefit from the appreciation in value of the property EITAS owns – it is “quasi-governmental” property and is not on the tax rolls.
- **Recent historical letdown:** The last group home EITAS built in 2004 (Nolen Manor) cost the taxpayers over \$1.2 million. It was designed poorly, overpriced and it is not located conveniently within a community environment, but in a rural area of the County. EITAS should never make that type of mistake again.
- **Overstated economic advantages of real estate ownership:** If EITAS decides to sell a piece of property, we cannot automatically assume that there will be a profit from the sale based upon the difference between the original purchase price and the sales price due to appreciation. We have to take into consideration how much we have invested in that property over the years in renovations, maintenance, insurance, and other costs, and deduct that from any “profit” made. If a profit is made, it will be rolled back into our budget for services – taxpayers receive no benefit from the sale other than EITAS has more cash to purchase services. As an example, we are currently pursuing the sale of a group home which is a large beautiful home in an established neighborhood

that could easily be converted back to a single family dwelling. The purchase price in 1980 was \$74,585; the current value in 2007 is estimated at \$276,000. But in the past 27 years we have invested \$159,473 in the property in renovations, repairs, and maintenance. We might be able to make some profit from that sale. But if we ever decide to sell the \$1.2 million Nolen Manor property, we would never get our money back on it. Who would buy it? A provider would not, because they can build their own for \$500,000. A private citizen would not, because it was built for a specific purpose as a group home and is not suitable as a single family dwelling – at least not at that price. So there would be no financial gain to the taxpayer – in fact we would lose a significant amount of taxpayer money.

- **The idea that EITAS is the only appropriate owner is incorrect:** When a residential provider owns their own building they have control over how it is used and maintained, it is listed as an asset on their books, they can obtain grants to repair and furnish it, and the rates they are paid by DMH include reimbursement for mortgage costs, upkeep, etc. The 59 residential providers in Jackson County either own or lease their buildings, except for the ten owned by EITAS. It does not seem logical that if it were so difficult and costly for them to own their own property, why these 59 agencies would choose to do so to this extent.
- **EITAS has the ability to control services without ownership:** There have been comments made that if we do not own the building we cannot control the services being provided there, but that is a false argument. There are well-developed legal devices at the disposal of EITAS to ensure that we have authority over what homes and properties we fund.

EITAS, as it has done in the past, will work with DMH, stakeholders, and the providers to ascertain where group homes are needed. EITAS can control who goes into the home and what kind of services clients receive by how the providers are funded through grants and who EITAS agrees to fund with Medicaid waiver dollars. EITAS contracts can and do require meeting many expectations. With the Support Services staff monitoring the quality of services being delivered and with funding attached to the individual and not the facility, EITAS has more control of services than it has ever had before.

II. Legal/Ethical Responsibilities of EITAS

“The board of directors shall be a legal entity empowered to establish and/or operate a sheltered workshop as defined in section 178.900, RSMo, residence facilities, or related services, for the care or employment, or both, of handicapped persons. The facility may operate at one or more locations in the county or city not within a county. Once established, the board may, in its own name engage in and contract for any and all types of services, actions or endeavors, not contrary to the law, necessary to the successful and efficient prosecution and continuation of the business and purposes for which it is created...”

The statute does not say that we have to construct or buy any buildings. That may have been necessary when there were few providers who had little resources of their own, but that is not the case now. At one time, owning property was a choice EITAS made, but now it is not our only choice.

Moreover, the strategic plan for 2006 to 2008 does not say EITAS will never build or develop another piece of property. What it does say is this: “EITAS will work with providers to develop ways to provide needed residential programs, and in the future will act as the developer of last resort for any new residential projects. EITAS will be open to partnering with providers and developers to create new residential opportunities with the least cost and the most leverage of EITAS’ financial resources as

possible.” During our entire history we have acted as the funder of last resort so as not to supplant or replace funding that is available from other sources. It is a logical extension for such a policy to work for facilities as well.

As we have pursued this new strategy, in just the first six months of the plan we have been approached by three separate residential providers interested in partnering with us on the construction of two new Level III group homes and a 15 unit apartment complex – all with minimal investment on the part of EITAS.

The above reflects just a different way of accomplishing the same thing – more residences and more services. The major difference is the level of financial commitment required from EITAS, both in getting the buildings constructed and in the ongoing liabilities of ownership. We will be more accountable for our expenditures; overall investments will be lower; and taxpayer dollars will go farther. Benefits flow to the taxpayer in getting more value for the dollars spent, to EITAS in meeting and exceeding its obligations, and most of all to the persons we serve – with facilities being provided at a faster rate and at less cost to Jackson County.

In summary, this position represents a philosophy that the Board has chosen; a philosophy that the Board believes brings the most services to the most clients. Ultimately, the Board believes that this choice will create more not less group homes as more county funds are leveraged in partnerships for the creation of the same. The EITAS Board is accountable to taxpayers as to how we spend funding to provide services, and part of that responsibility is stretching dollars strategically to meet the most amount of critical need. If we can make our taxpayer dollars go farther and bring more services to individuals by partnering with agencies in new and different ways, it is the sensible and responsible thing to do. 🏡