



2015 ANNUAL REPORT
COALITION OF TEXANS
WITH DISABILITIES

Letter from CTD Executive Director
Dennis Borel

Dear Disability Rights Supporters and Partners,

Is it hot in here? Or is it just us? With reports of 2015 being the **hottest year in recorded history**, we couldn't help draw some comparisons between our review of 2015 and the year's all-over-the-map weather. **Thunder** in the State Capitol on April 1? It sure sounded like it with the loud voices of advocates under the dome, calling for a decent wage for community attendants. The **tsunami** rising from all corners of Texas as legislators proposed moving independent living programs to the Texas Workforce Commission? That was the **flood** of emails and phone calls successfully redirecting IL to Health & Human Services. The **winds of change** blowing through our state were assisted by CTD's numerous trainings and presentations. The **rays of sunshine** were there too, with the Consumer Directed Services Division helping hundreds of families support a member with a disability or senior to live at home and our arts projects **shining a light** on creativity and beauty in the disability community.

Whether the sun smiles on us or we're headed for stormy weather, CTD is ready to promote change in the full inclusion of people with disabilities into their community of choice. The work's not done. Rain or shine, come with CTD, and help us achieve real, lasting progress.

For a Barrier Free Society,

Dennis Borel



Dennis accepts the 2015 Luminary Award from the Texas Healthcare & Bioscience Institute.

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@TXDisabilities

CTD Board

CTD's Board reflects the population of Texas in terms of types of disability, geographic representation, ethnicity, and income level.

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CDS Payroll: Ashley Mitzel, Rosie Williams
CDS Claims Analyst: Erin Jones
Developmental Disabilities Policy Fellow*:
Chris Masey**

* Person with a disability

** Parent of a child with a disability

+ Financial Support for the CTD

Developmental Disabilities Policy Fellowship is provided by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, with Federal funds* made available by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities. *\$67,500 (71%) DD funds; \$27,011 (29%) non-federal resources.



Dennis braves temperatures in the 30s to speak at Rare Disease Day 2015.



April 1: The \$10 Campaign for attendant wages

The skies cleared for our biennial rally and advocacy day, April 1 in Austin. Over 200 attendants, consumers, family members, and advocates came from all over the state to urge key legislators to raise attendant wages to a base of \$10 per hour. Among the participants were Austin and El Paso branches of the Advocacy Corps (A-Corps)*, a CTD program aimed at developing young self-advocates with disabilities.

The morning of April 1st, attendees participated in a training, then marched to the North steps of the Capitol (above) for an enthusiastic rally, where more supporters joined in. A long time ally of an attendant wage raise, Representative John Zerwas (below, with Dennis Borel), was among the line up of powerful speakers.

Inside the Capitol, advocates spoke with representatives from the Governor's office and made 45 office visits to key and local legislators, delivering petitions with over 3,000 signatures in support of raising attendant wages.



In the end, the Legislature made provisions for a 14¢ per hour raise in attendant wages. This will bring the lowest paid attendants' wage to \$8 per hour, not even close our goal of \$10. But CTD will maintain contact with our newly activated advocates and continue to push for a meaningful increase.

If you don't like the weather in Texas, wait five minutes.

Certain pieces of legislation might carry the same description! As bills are drafted, public opinion, coalitions among (or against) legislators, behind-the-scenes dealings, and advocacy efforts can change the direction of a piece of legislation at the drop of a hat. CTD works hard to take advantage of these moments when we can positively influence a bill and to be vigilant for under-the-radar changes that would hurt the disability community.

The 84th Texas Legislative session wasn't all sunshine and rainbows, but we wouldn't call it a total wash, either. While we made little progress with some of our top priorities like raising attendant wages, we also scored some major victories:

PASSED: Texans Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE)

An estimated + 1/2 million Texans with disabilities will be able to start a savings account and plan for the future without the fear of losing their eligibility for Medicaid.

CTD played an important role in passing legislation to enable this federal program, and we couldn't have done that without the help of legislators and our members every step of the way.

Now, we're excited to be involved in the development of the Texas ABLE program in an advisory capacity. Our staff has been appointed to the Texas ABLE advisory committee to ensure that the voices of Texans with disabilities are heard and continue to guide and support this program into implementation.



PASSED: Guardianship Reform

Another ray of sunshine this session: CTD and our partners in the Guardianship Reform and Supported Decision Making Workgroup (below; right) helped make Texas the first state in the country to formally implement Supported Decision Making (SDM). SDM is an alternative to a traditional guardianship arrangement, where a person can receive support without giving up their rights.

In addition, the GRSDM worked to pass a number of guardianship reform measures, including a Bill of Rights for people under guardianship and a requirement that courts consider whether a guardianship may be averted or limited.



GRSDM post-session celebration (L-R): Judge Guy Herman, Rep. John Smithee, Dawn Carlton, David Slayton, Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, Senator Judith Zaffirini, Jessaca Bond, Dennis Borel, and Belinda Carlton (TCDD). Photo Credit: TCDD

PASSED: keep Independent Living in Health & Human Services

SB 208 would have moved the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), a rash move CTD felt would be detrimental to consumers. So we called our members to action, and the response was resounding! Over 400 advocates flooded the inboxes of 63 legislators with 6,341 emails! While DARS itself is dissolving, Independent Living programs, including Centers for Independent Living (CILs), will be moving to HHSC next fall.

PASSED: Accessible Parking Reform

Several legislators filed bills regarding accessible parking this session, and we were hopeful that a wave of positive changes to enforcement and regulation was on the way. One, HB 1317 (Bohac), would have created accessible van only spaces, with the unintended consequences of eliminating enforcement. Through targeted advocacy, we were able to change the bill into a statewide study on accessible parking issues.

PASSED: \$353.3M Appropriations to CTD's Top Budget Targets

Getting funding for all of our priorities has a snowball's chance in hell. But we are proud to report that we successfully advocated for adequate funding of Promoting Independence (funding to help people at imminent risk of institutionalization), and continued funding for Preadmission Screening and Resident Review (PASRR) for specialized services in nursing homes.

PASSED: Advance Directives Reform

A major change in the Texas Advance Directives Act does more to protect the lives and end-of-life decisions of hospitalized, incapacitated patients, including people with disabilities.

PASSED: Better Consumer Protections in Medicaid Managed Care

Long overlooked, ombudsmen and other consumer assistance measures will grow.

Finally, not all advocacy wins come with a bill number; sometimes, we are able to leverage our connections and position to promote good policy without legislation. Two examples:

- Early in 2015, a pharmaceutical cure for Hepatitis C was developed. Our staff moved HHSC's Pharmaceuticals and Therapeutics Committee to approve the drug for the Medicaid formulary and accelerate it into practice.
- Because of current practices, Medicaid service providers can be penalized for errors they didn't make. The money paid out to them is then recouped, or taken back. CTD has felt the sting of this unfair policy in our own CDS Division. Representative Klick filed HB 3917 to address this situation. The bill did not pass; but after legislators forced the issue in a hearing, HHSC made the appropriate corrections on their own and committed to lasting change.

Since the sun set on the 84th Legislature, we have continued to pursue key advisory positions, develop partnerships, and activate advocates all over the state. Success in these areas includes the appointment of CTD staff to the Texas ABLE Advisory Committee, the Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities, the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, the Parking Mobility Board and the State Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Committee.



Dennis presents Tom Suehs with CTD's Justin Dart Award for his work on guardianship reform.

We keep our weather eyes open.

Outside of the Capitol, too, we watch for any opportunity to influence policy and educate others. We work to bring our knowledge of disability issues and experience as advocates to the general public, service professionals, state agency staff, and many others.

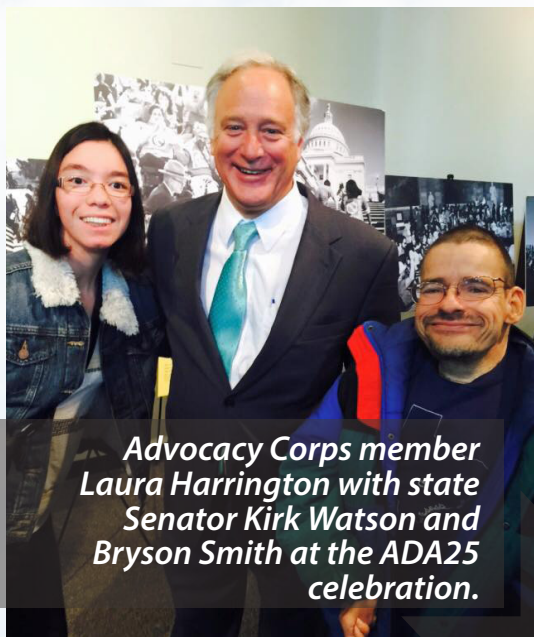


Dennis leads a Q&A with state representatives Garnet Coleman and Sarah Davis.

In January, we held our first ever **Legislative Briefing**, bringing together representatives from a diverse range of organizations to announce our own policy priorities and to provide a networking opportunity to develop further partnerships.

We regrouped after session in October at the **Houston Policy Roundtable**, bringing together area health and disability organizations with policy and legislative experts. Our speakers reviewed takeaways from the 84th Legislature and discussed tactics for successful advocacy (above).

The **Advocacy Corps** (A-Corps)⁺ was a new CTD program aimed at developing young and emerging self-advocates. In addition to a series of trainings, CTD's DD Policy Fellow Chris Masey* facilitated multiple opportunities for these emerging advocates to put their knowledge and skills into practice over the course of the legislature. Members attended the **ADA25 Trailblazers** celebration on March 4 (left) and our April 1st **\$10 Campaign Rally and Advocacy Day**.



Advocacy Corps member Laura Harrington with state Senator Kirk Watson and Bryson Smith at the ADA25 celebration.

Later on in the fall, we held a series of 12 **Effective Interactions with People with Disabilities** trainings for over 1,000 Superior HealthPlan service provider staff all over the state.

In addition to the events we hosted, CTD presented or spoke at events of many other organizations throughout the year, including:

- Accessibility Professionals Association
- Paralyzed Veterans of America, Texas Chapter
- Rare Disease Day
- Texas Forward
- Austin Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities
- State Independent Living Council
- Texas State Bar CLE
- The Gene and Dave Show
- Volar CIL
- Texas Public Policy Foundation



Chase leads an interactive and engaged group at CTD's training. The team's insights made for a unique experience!

When it rains, it pours.

2015 was our biggest year ever for Cinema Touching Disability! For our 12th annual Film Festival, November 5 & 6, we turned our attention to barrier-breaking women with disabilities, bringing two award-winning documentaries (not to mention thier stars!) to Austin.

As always, we began our program both nights with winning entries from our international **Short Film Competition**. The Competition this year really exploded with a record 150 entries from 23 different countries!



Jessica Cox with One World Karate student and fan, Caity Masey.

First place in the non-documentary division went to **Guest Room**, in which a young woman with Down Syndrome grapples with questions of intimacy, identity, and motherhood after an unplanned pregnancy with her boyfriend. **Menke's Disease: Finding Help and Hope** picked up first place in the documentary division, introducing audiences to this rare genetic disorder.

Right Footed (2015) was our big feature on Friday night, a documentary that chronicles two years in the life of **Jessica Cox**. Born without arms, Cox is the world's only armless pilot, an accomplished martial artist, a college graduate, and an advocate for the disabled. Jessica and her husband attended the Festival Friday night to introduce the film and answer audience questions.

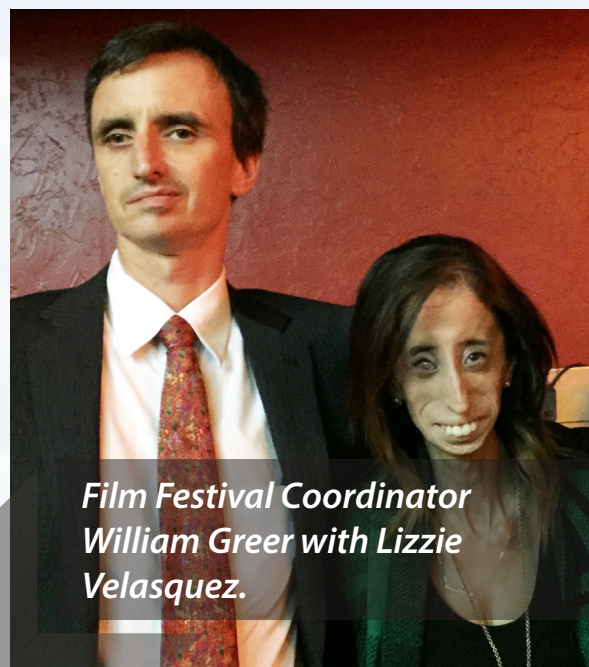
In conjunction with the martial arts component of the film, CTD partnered with Austin-based One World Karate to hold a mixed-ability martial arts exhibition to kick off the Festival. Jessica joined the group of young students with various disabilities to show off their moves, including board-breaking.

2015 SXSW Audience Award-winning documentary **A Brave Heart: The Lizzie Velasquez Story** took top billing on Saturday. Born with a rare syndrome that prevents her from gaining weight, Austinite Velasquez was bullied as a child

for looking different. The film recounts details of her physical and emotional journey, from bullying victim to anti-bullying activist and social media power house.

After the film, we were thrilled to bring Lizzie and her parents to the theater for an **audience Q&A!** We couldn't have planned a more engaging, powerful way to close the Festival, and it was clear the audience agreed: they gave Lizzie a standing ovation when she entered the theater and couldn't wait to get her autograph afterwards.

After the Festival, we got another affirming surprise: our staff noted that some of the wheelchair seats in our theater were too close to a ledge and potentially unsafe. A Drafthouse manager put in a maintenance request to address the problem, and we received word later that they have been approved. It's a small detail, but is one more way that CTD is removing barriers!



Film Festival Coordinator William Greer with Lizzie Velasquez.

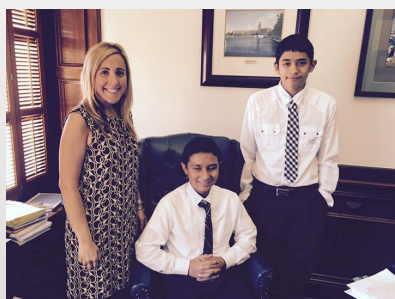
We go where the wind takes us.

While much of our work follows a plan, we also take advantage of many unseen opportunities that come our way throughout the year. We look forward to working with the local disability community, youth, service providers, businesses, and others in unexpected ways.



Early in the year, one of our long time sponsors, Hart Intercivic, reached out to us about their new **accessible voting machine**. We hosted and coordinated several days of user testing, bringing in people with a range of disabilities, to help improve the machines.

The Lion & Pirate, a monthly inclusive open mic night we co-host with VSA Texas, celebrated its 1-year anniversary in February. This little event has really grown! Highlights from 2015 include a visit from singer-songwriter of the disability rights movement Jeff Moyer, and the “hijacking” of the event by a group of local poets (left: swashbucklers Milton Sullivan & Richard Allen White).



In April, our ED Dennis Borel participated in **CEO-for-a-Day**, showing two area middle school students the ropes at CTD and the Capitol (left: Jennifer Saenz (general counsel to Sen. Chuy Hinojosa), Victor Torres (seated), and Joel Rodriguez).

This summer, through our connections at state agencies and good partner relationships, we helped create **employment opportunities** for 7 young Ft. Benders with I/DD.



Uber launched its **UberACCESS pilot** in July, an extension of the app which targets people with mobility and vision impairments. CTD is glad to have been an outreach partner in this effort, and we’re continuing to work to make the sharing economy more accessible to people with disabilities.

On a September trip to Dallas, our Advocacy team met with **UT Arlington** to discuss how to secure state funding for their outstanding adaptive sports program. It was a great meeting of the minds and the start of something big!

For the first time ever, we had a tie for Grand Prize of our **Pen 2 Paper creative writing contest**: David Borden’s non-fictional “It Will be More Beautiful” and Joyce Frohn’s poem, “Foggy Morning.”



In October, we paid a visit to the **Austin Clubhouse** (left), a psychosocial rehabilitation program for adults with severe and persistent mental illness. We look forward to working with them as we pursue state funding for clubhouse services.

CDS Update

CTD’s CDS Division, led by COO Denise Ellison and core staff Rosie Williams, Ashley Mitzel, and Erin Jones, continues to grow and **serves over 300 families**. Interaction between the CDS and advocacy teams leverages better outcomes in both areas.

The experiences of CDS consumers and attendants lends real-world stories to our advocates and knowledge picked up in the public policy arena gives early notice to implement changes in CDS practice.



Rosie and Amerigroup’s Ruben Ramos celebrate community attendants.

Looking ahead

The forecast is bright for 2016! Our advocacy team is planning input into the upcoming HHSC transition and how to protect and improve the state's programs that serve people with disabilities.

Our staff remains on the front lines of the development of Texas ABLE program as well as a statewide study on accessible parking enforcement.

Our CDS team has been hard at work improving and expanding our abilities to provide critical financial management services to families choosing consumer direction.

To better communicate in our world of ever-evolving technology, we began efforts to develop a mobile version of our website and look forward to a spring launch date.

Finally, in addition to our annual awareness events like the Film Fest, we're planning a new initiative that's sure to make a splash: we're entering the Harvest Moon Regatta, a 2-day sailing race in Galveston, with a full crew of sailors with disabilities! More details coming soon!



CTD Staff . Top (L-R): Rosie Williams, Dennis Borel, William Greer, Ashley Mitzel, Erin Jones, Denise Ellison. Bottom: Chase Bearden, Susie Angel, Laura Perna. Taking cover elsewhere: Chris Masey[†]

2015 by the numbers

- \$353.3 Million Secured for programs and supports
- +10,000 Member Actions (emails, calls, petition signatures) with record number of new advocates
- 272 Bills Worked on during session
- 239 Advocates Trained
- 47 Partnerships
- 25 Media mentions
- 24 countries represented in submissions to our Short Film Competition and Creative Writing Contest
- 11 Press Conferences & Events Attended