

CTD 2020 Annual Summary

As we look back on 2020 to summarize our work, it's hard to know where to start. Nothing could have prepared CTD or our community for the mammoth upsets of 2020: massive social unrest, a grueling election, and of course, the coronavirus pandemic.

During a year that seemed to get stranger and more stressful by the day, we are proud that we kept working toward our mission and produced the programs and results that you have come to expect (even if the delivery was a little different). Read on for a summary of CTD's work in 2020.

CTD's COVID Response

As the realities of the pandemic began to set in, it became clear that we would need to refocus on certain **policy and practice developments to ensure access to care and oppose discrimination**.

CTD weighed in on multiple practical changes to **support continuity of care**, like extending authorizations and prescriptions and supporting community care. We took the lead on advocating for the **inclusion of certain therapies in telehealth—and got them**. CTD was the central disability group at the table on mass critical care guidelines, **protecting people with disabilities** in allocation of scarce healthcare resources. In December, we provided invited testimony to the Senate Health & Human Services committee with specific recommendations on supporting community living and avoiding congregate settings.

"I know you have a lot of work and requests to handle. Just want to say a big thanks! Your help has given healing and hope to many." Donna Miller, Blue Sky Abilities

In the area of public education, CTD joined several collaborative efforts to encourage state and national agencies to **prioritize student well-being** in their guidance about COVID-19.

Our **Consumer Directed Services Division** served, without interruption, over 700 consumers and attendants while restructuring from an office environment to work at home protocols.

"When times get really tough, encourage your team to remember that your program makes a HUGE positive difference in the lives that you touch." CDS attendant

Voting during the Pandemic

From early on, we saw that the pandemic revealed or made worse systemic problems that the disability community has been working to change for decades. **Voting and elections** were front and center in this trend. In addition to including voting in our grassroots organizing work with REVUP Texas, CTD joined **four lawsuits to protect the rights of voters with disabilities**:

- The two regarding **mail-in ballots** (signature matching and accessibility to voters with visual disabilities) are currently pending. For now, however, it remains legal for the state of Texas to reject a mail-in ballot based on mismatched signatures, without giving voters the chance to appeal.
- We joined the Texas Civil Rights Project's suit to ensure adequate signage for **curbside voting** in Bexar County. The suit resulted in a court order that Bexar County have signs in place at all 302 polling sites for Election Day.
- We wrote a last-minute amicus brief that helped **protect the ballots** of 127,000 drive-through voters in Harris County.

Finally, prompted by our members, CTD wrote a letter to the Texas Secretary of State (SOS) to get clarification on **the use of a signature stamp for mail-in ballots**. The SOS has not changed its current position: a person who wants to use a signature stamp on a mail-in ballot application or carrier envelope must have a witness sign the document for the voter. Particularly when people are isolating from each other, this requirement of a witness presents an additional barrier to casting a private, independent ballot. We've added signature stamps to our legislative voting priorities for 2021.

Shifting to Virtual Events and Organizing

We moved our grassroots advocacy organizing and arts programs into all virtual spaces—and it actually worked out pretty well!

We held 12 virtual sessions in our **Raise Your Voice Advocate! Connection Program** (RYV)—7 more than we had planned for in person. We achieved our original goals of educating hundreds of Texans about a range of disability issues, connecting participants not only with CTD staff, but also with each other, and gathering input from Texans with disabilities, which will inform our advocacy work in 2021.

"I wanted to reach out and tell you how wonderful the RYV presentation was last week. It was such a pleasant and motivating experience!"

RYV participant

It's a similar story for **Cinema Touching Disability**. Between CTDF: Online! (Aug. 15-Sept. 15) and the regularly scheduled Cinema Touching Disability Film Festival (Oct. 16-18), we brought 1 feature film and 16 shorts to hundreds of fans throughout Texas and all over the world, connecting filmmakers with our audience members along the way. Read the full wrap up at ctdfilmfest.org!

"During this time when none of us can gather and enjoy movies the way we enjoy doing, this festival was a welcome change, to see movies and still feel like we were all in the same room!"

Cedric Hill, Director, 2020 non-documentary winner NOISY

With our partners at Art Spark Texas, we took our monthly **Lion & Pirate inclusive open mic** into the virtual space in April. Once again, this allowed us to connect with artists and audiences

near and far, including many Pen 2 Paper creative writing contest winners and finalists in other states and countries.

Whatever the future holds, we believe virtual gathering is here to stay, and we plan to take full advantage of its possibilities!

Continuing work in progress

While the pandemic prompted changes in our areas of focus and strategies for 2020, we also continued work on many priorities that have concerned our membership for years (or even decades) prior to COVID.

We continued to represent you at the political poker table, serving on **many critical workgroups and advisory boards**, like the State Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Committee, Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition, and Texas Oral Health Coalition. CTD was the sole disability advocate to participate in the **Texas Department of Transportation's Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) Task Force** meetings, advising on accessible transportation development, including autonomous vehicles. CTD was the lead advocate to work with **Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)** executives on improving access to the vocational rehabilitation vehicle modifications program.

We worked with our many partner organizations to achieve real results on pressing policy developments. This summer, CTD led efforts to stave off proposed cuts to **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) respite services**. Later in the year, a state agency quietly approved the repeal of an **anti-discrimination policy** that would allow social workers to turn away clients on the basis on sexuality, gender identity or expression, or disability. Partnering with the National Association of Social Workers—Texas Chapter, we pushed back—and won.

Looking ahead

2021 is a year the legislature meets, and as of this letter, it's still not completely clear what policy-making, advocacy, and civic engagement is going to be like. CTD has prepared our staff and membership to play an active role, regardless of how the next five months play out. We've laid groundwork to position our priorities for success—and noted hints from legislators and the state about what's to come. A few high level plans and observations:

We are continuing forward with our work to **add a dental benefit to non-HCBS Medicaid** programs serving adults with disabilities. After several sessions of steady progress, we engaged in a variety of activities over the year to promote awareness and continue building the case around this issue. We're looking forward to working with our past partners, Texas Advocates, Impact Texas, and Texas Health Institute, as well as a new heavy hitter, Texas LULAC.

Our priorities of course include **raising the base wage of community attendants**, whose role of keeping Texans with disabilities and seniors healthy and in their own homes only became more critical in the pandemic. But even before 2020, this workforce was at risk of a major collapse:

due to demographic and economic forces, TWC reports community attendants as the state's largest growth occupation, but cannot address recruitment and retention because the low wages do not meet federal minimum measures of livability.

Another long-time issue, the **Medicaid waiver list**, also took a shocking hit during the interim. With 165,000+ unduplicated individuals as of August 2020, Texas has the nation's largest and longest wait list. In their budget request, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) set aside funds to reduce the list by 1,756 slots per year. On average, a Texan joining the interest list at #165,000 would be looking **at a wait of 93 years** before reaching the top of the list and receiving services!

2021 will be another opportunity for the Texas legislature to address long-time problems in **public education and services to children**. It's no secret the state has been in hot water about failures to serve its youngest citizens. This October alone, the US Department of Education cited Texas for noncompliance with IDEA Part C (ECI), AND sent the Texas Education Agency a letter demanding additional proof of progress on serving kids with disabilities.

The pandemic is certain to take center stage at the Capitol—as well it should—but legislators have a responsibility not to ignore other systemic, far-reaching problems. Fortunately, CTD strengthened our advocacy team this year, with the addition of Advocacy Director **Jolene Sanders-Foster** and Mental Health Peer Policy Fellow **Jennifer Toon**. CTD learned long ago that the secret to our success is self-advocates plus our team, and we have already seen significant wins from these dogged and respected advocates in the areas of education, ECI, and mental health and discipline in public schools

CTD is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with Federal Tax ID #74-2071160. CTD is a social and economic impact organization benefitting Texans with all disabilities of all ages. CTD is a membership organization controlled by people with disabilities. Your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.