

## Act 378 Changed the Course of History - A Reason to Celebrate

July 22, 2019

Disability advocates and public officials who had been instrumental in the passage of Act 378 of 1989 and the subsequent development and implementation of the Community and Family



Support System (CFSS) Plan, came together on Wednesday evening, July 17<sup>th</sup>, to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the passage of this landmark piece of legislation. Kay Marcel, former Council Chair and leader of the CFSS movement, came in from Iowa to speak at the event and celebrate with fellow advocates. Louisiana Department of Health Deputy Secretary Mark Thomas shared his congratulations to the Council and all the advocates who worked on the development and passage of Act 378. Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs Bambi Polotzola concluded the program by presenting a Certificate of Recognition to the Council from Governor Edwards in acknowledgement of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Passage of Act 378.

*Original CFSS Advisory Committee Members, from left, Tara Messenger, Drew Fluke, Francis Hilburn, and Kay Marcel, Chair.*

In 1988, the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council hosted a Community Integration Conference to introduce Louisiana to innovative programs in other states that supported children and adults with developmental disabilities in their own homes. Almost all services available at the time in Louisiana were facility-based or institutional. The Council answered the call from conference participants to make in-home supports available in Louisiana and the Community and Family Support Movement was born!

The Council formed a steering committee of parents, self-advocates, and other stakeholders with its goal to create a community and family support system. LaCAN, the Council's grassroots



advocacy network, was established for parents and self-advocates to educate legislators on the need for this system. Representative Ted Haik offered to sponsor legislation for its creation.

*Special Guests, from left, Debbie Braud's daughters' Brandi Kelly and Jodi Molliere, Patsy Davies Hampton, Jeanne Abadie, and Alma Stewart.*

The Community and Family Support System Act (Act 378) passed unanimously in the 1989 Legislative Session. It called for the Council to develop a plan for a comprehensive system of individualized supports to be implemented by the state based on guiding principles included in the Act. The plan was written over the course of two years with extensive stakeholder input. Armed with data, information, and personal stories from four Council-funded pilot projects in family support and supported living,

advocates demonstrated to the Legislature that children and adults with the most severe disabilities could live in their own homes with appropriate supports cost-effectively. The Community and Family Support System Plan was approved and initially funded by the Legislature in 1991.

Every year since 1991, the Council and LaCAN have advocated to expand or maintain community and family support services. Hundreds of millions of dollars in state and federal funds to implement the Plan have resulted from this advocacy over the past three decades. Countless individuals with disabilities and their families have received services in their own



*Current and Former Council Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Executive Directors, from left, Clarice Eichelberger, April Dunn, Robert Paddy, Michelle Hurst, Lynette Fontenot, Bill Sharpton, Kay Marcel, Donna Breaux, Sam Beech, and Sandee Winchell.*

homes and communities as a result of the passage of Act 378. This tremendous outcome would not have been possible without the collaboration and support from so many partners along the way, but most notably, are the network of Families Helping Families Resource Centers across the state, the many leaders the Council worked with at the LA Department of Health who embraced the values in this legislation, and the champions in the legislature who listened to families' stories and carried the torch. And most importantly, all the self-advocates and parents who were willing to share their stories, to put themselves out there to improve the system, not only for themselves or their child, but for others who would come after them. None of these successes would have

been possible without these incredible advocates who have shared their stories and their vision for a better tomorrow with legislators and other public officials.

Act 378 changed the course of history for people with developmental disabilities in Louisiana. It provided the supports for them to be fully participating and contributing members of their communities, and for that, there is truly reason to celebrate.

## Contact Us

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